

PLUCK AND LUCK

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THE RIVAL RANGERS; OR, THE SONS OF FREEDOM.

By GEN'L JAS. A. GORDON.



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The Rival Rangers;

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG PATRIOTS.

The 4th of July, 1776.

From the earliest morning the streets of Philadelphia had been filled with a crowd of both sexes and every age, all excited upon a common question.

The question, if put into words, would have been: What will be the decision of the Congress?"

While the populace thus anxiously waited, an event destined to affect the fortunes of the world, in how great a degree cannot even yet be estimated, was being deliberated upon—should the colonies still submit to the despotism of a foreign power, or should they assert their independence, and declare themselves free?

There may have been, no doubt there were, both staunch loyalists and lukewarm patriots among the crowd, but when after the earlier hours of the morning wore away, John Dixon appeared before the old State House, and in clear, ringing tones read the Declaration of Independence, it was with one mighty voice that the shouts of approbation rent the air.

Then, also, the great Liberty Bell began to ring in token that the die was cast—heralding, in loud and sonorous tones, the birth of a new nation, a republic greater than the annals of the world had known before.

Still the people's shouts rent the air, still the great bell elanged its triumphant peals, when down through Chestnut Street came the roll of drums, the notes of a martial march, and the tramp of a body of armed men.

The crowd opened to make a passage for them down the street, and enthusiastic cheers were raised for the young Patriot Rangers.

About two hundred strong, they were indeed a fine body of men—boys, rather, for many of them were not more than sixteen or seventeen, and none of them over twenty-two years of age.

But as, dressed in the Continental uniform, they marched down the street with the precision of veterans, with flashing eyes and faces radiant with patriotic enthusiasm, they seemed well worthy of the bravest foeman's steel, and the very flower, as indeed they were, of Pennsylvania's chivalry.

The corps had been organized more than six months before, and called the Patriot Rangers, a rival to one raised earlier in the loyalist cause, and placed under the command of a young English nobleman named Lord Dane.

The loyalist troop, which was called the King's Rangers, had been recruited mostly from the farming population, supplemented by drafts of Hessians, but the rival Patriot Rangers was composed solely of native born American youths.

There were the sons of many wealthy citizens among them, who, applauding the patriotic spirit of the young heroes, had presented them with arms and accoutrements.

Above them floated a silken flag bearing the stars of the thirteen States, the flag that had been adopted by Washington several months before, and which had been presented to them by the young ladies of the city, among whom more than one had a sweetheart or a sister.

At their head rode their captain upon a coal-black charger.

A fitting leader was Dane Vincent for these brave and patriotic youths.

Though little more than nineteen, his commanding figure seemed to have gained its full development, and the expression of his face and the glance of his clear, grey eyes at once bespoke him as one of nature's gentlemen, a true Homeric king of men.

As he now rode down the street, the eyes of the whole crowd followed him admiringly. He looked, with his yellow hair and keen eye, the very embodiment of some old Norse viking, content with nothing less than victory or death.

He was, however, no mere carpet knight, selected as the captain on account of his handsome face and figure. With his sword he had earned the right to command from the very earliest battles of the revolution, at Concord, Lexington, and

Bunker Hill. He had always been in the foremost rank of the fighters.

Nearly eighteen years before he had been left upon the doorstep of Silas Vincent, a wealthy citizen of Philadelphia, either to live or die, as chance might have it.

Old Silas Vincent was a bachelor, and had the reputation of being a rather hard man, but the sight of the poor little waif's infantile helplessness touched his heart, and he adopted and cared for it as he would have done for his own.

There was nothing by which in the future the child could be identified except a small gold locket hung by a slender chain about its neck, with the words engraved upon it:

"To my little Dane."

Thus he had been christened Dane, and the old merchant bestowed upon him as a surname his own, just as though he had been the child's father.

When the boy was about fifteen years old his benefactor died, and though he had always been accounted a rich man, after his estate was settled up, but a few hundred dollars remained.

This, in accordance with his will, was handed over to his adopted son, who at once left Philadelphia with the world before him which he had to open.

Arriving in Boston, he immediately became fired with the spirit of patriotism and opposition to British tyranny then exciting all classes, and joined his fate with that of his country.

He had been made one of the disguised party who threw King George's stamped tea into Boston Harbor, and, as has been said, fought nobly in the patriot ranks at the battles of Bunker Hill, Lexington and Concord.

About six months before he had returned to Philadelphia full of the idea of raising a corps of youths like himself—true sons of freedom, willing and ready to die for the glorious cause they espoused.

The idea had been nobly responded to, and he had at once been chosen captain.

Every individual member had sworn the most solemn oath to be true and faithful to the death, and that not even the ties of the nearest kindred should prevent him from denouncing any traitor, or, if his duty required it, killing him with his own hand.

As they marched now through the city they came to a halt for a few minutes before the balcony on which the members of the society stood, and then presenting arms once more unfurled the folds of the starry flag and resumed their march.

Their evolutions were a model of military precision, and not the discipline of any of the boasted British regiments could have outdone them in the slightest detail.

It was a perfect ovation all through the city until the suburbs were reached, and the command was given to fall into more easy marching order.

It was indeed a patriotic and heroic task the Rangers had set themselves.

Tired of the inglorious and monotonous routine of drill, they were determined to prove themselves worthy of the name of patriot in the glorious cause they had espoused.

They were now on the march to join the forces under Washington at New York.

CHAPTER II.

A TRAITOR.

At sundown the captain gave the command to halt and encamp for the night.

In less than half an hour the preparations were completed, and bivouac fires shone cheerily through the gloom.

Sentries were posted, and by ten o'clock the majority of the young Patriot Rangers were fast asleep.

An hour or more passed in solemn silence, broken only by the measured tread of the sentinels, when the sound of distant musketry was borne upon the night air.

The bugle sounded the alarm, and in an instant the Rangers had started from their sleep and grasped their weapons.

The distant firing still continued, but less constant than before, and with an alacrity that would have done no discredit to far more experienced troops, the young patriot had formed in marching order.

As Dane Vincent gave the order forward march, from behind the hill rising to the westward a lurid glare shot upward into the sky.

"It is those dastardly Hessians!" Dane muttered, "and they are burning some inoffensive farmer's house about his ears."

Then raising his voice he gave the order:

"Double-quick time. Forward!"

He urged his horse on as he spoke, and his men, obeying his command, followed at a run.

In a few minutes the crest of the hill was reached, and in the valley below could be seen a house and outbuildings in flames, while nearly a hundred men in red coats were standing around, evidently enjoying their fiendish work.

A frown that was as dark as midnight came upon Dane Vincent's face, as he drew his sword from its sheath.

"At them, boys!" he cried, half turning in his saddle. "Double-quick! Forward! Charge!"

The Rangers answered with a hearty hurrah, and before the enemy had time to recover themselves and form in order they were upon them.

The soldiers were not, as the captain had supposed, Hessians, but a detachment of the rival corps, the King's Rangers.

This knowledge lent to the young patriots an added energy, and they dashed upon their foes like an overwhelming torrent.

The fight, however, was soon over, and the loyalists took to their heels for the adjacent woods.

The patriots, carried away by the excitement of the moment, were about to follow, but the voice of their captain recalled them.

"We do not want to be hampered with prisoners," he said. "Fall in—form—dress!"

With the discipline of veterans they obeyed his orders, and stood dressing their line, while Dane Vincent dismounted and proceeded to examine the extent of the loyalists' depredations.

None of his men had been killed, and but one or two very slightly wounded.

He found the farmer and his wife, as well as their four sons, lying dead in front of the still blazing house, but they had not died without resistance, as was evident from the weapons in their hands, and more than a dozen red-coated Rangers lying dead around them.

A little further on he came to a female figure lying face downward upon the ground.

Thinking probably it was the farmer's daughter, he bent down and gently raised her face to see if she were still alive.

No sooner had he seen her face—a beautiful face it was, with tender, violet eyes and a crown of golden hair—than his own blanched, and he involuntarily exclaimed:

"Alice!"

The girl was not dead, but had only fainted, and now she opened her eyes and gazed around in a bewildered way.

Presently recollection returned, and a look of horror came into her eyes for a moment, but it quickly changed to one of surprise as she saw the face of Dane Vincent bending over her.

"Dane!" she exclaimed, in almost the same tone as he had but a moment before called her Alice.

"Yes, darling," he answered, "it is I, and, thank God, just in time. But how came you here? What——"

"Oh, I shudder to think of it," the girl cried, interrupting him. "It is all my fault this fearful affair has happened. Papa brought me here yesterday, and—and—you have heard of Lord Dane?"

"Yes," the young patriot answered, "I have heard of him. He is captain of the King's Rangers, and I know him, in spite of his title and noble birth, to be an unprincipled scoundrel. What of him?"

"He has persecuted me with his attentions for a long time past. This afternoon he asked me to fly with him, and when I refused he swore he would win me whether I desired it or not, and it was he who sent the soldiers to-night to burn down the house and carry me away. Oh, it was a dreadful sight. I saw Mr. Martin and his wife and sons shot down before my eyes. Horrible!"

The girl covered her eyes with her hands, and shuddered at the recollection, while a malediction escaped from between Dane Vincent's teeth.

"So it was he who has done this," he muttered. "I know now my enemy, and the day that he and I meet, I swear by the God above us that one of us shall die!"

Then bending over the still crouching form of the girl, he whispered a few soothing words, and returning to where his men stood in line, called his first lieutenant to him.

"You will take command," he said, "until I return. Let the camp be set here for the remainder of the night."

The lieutenant gave the necessary orders, while Dane Vincent, raising the girl from the ground, stood for a moment supporting her with his arm.

"Alice, dearest," he said, "I will take you back at once to your father's house. I hope it will be a lesson for him not to let you leave the city until affairs are quieter. Do you think you can endure a ride on horseback with me for an hour or more?"

He asked the question half playfully, and the girl put her arms up and wound them about his neck.

"I could endure anything with you, Dane," she said simply.

Giving a few final instructions to his lieutenant, he stuck his spurs into the horse's flanks, and dashed at a gallop in the direction of the city the Rangers had left that day.

The girl he had so opportunely rescued was the only daughter of one of Philadelphia's wealthiest bankers, whose name was Allan. Dane Vincent and Alice had loved each other since their childhood, but the proud father looked for a much higher union for his only child, than with a foundling who had not even a name he could call his own.

But notwithstanding this parental opposition, they continued to love each other, and some day, the young captain of the Rangers told himself, he might earn a name that even the banker could not but proudly acknowledge.

Now, as he held the girl in his arms, during their midnight ride, this feeling was stronger than ever, and when he at last deposited her safely at the door of her father's house he felt that the first step towards it was gained, and the banker, at least, owed him a debt of gratitude.

But with the thought came no gentler feeling for the cowardly Englishman who commanded the King's Rangers, and who had attempted the girl's ruin.

Instead, once more he called Heaven to witness that the day they met face to face one of them should die.

The first gray streaks of dawn had not yet begun to show in the sky by the time he had returned to the camp, and he lay down to take an hour or so of sleep before commencing the day's march.

But the sentries failed to discover a human figure crawling along the ground toward the lines of the camp.

It passed for a hundred yards or more beyond the beat of the

sentinels in the same prostrate manner, and then standing upright started at a run, and vanished in the mist.

What did it mean?

Was there treachery afoot? Was there a Judas in the ranks of the Patriot Rangers?

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

At daybreak the bugle sounded the reveille.

Springing to their feet the Rangers set about replenishing the waning bivouac fires and preparing breakfast.

By the time the sun was rising the hasty meal was finished, and the command was given to fall in.

The roll was called, and each responded to their name, until that of William Wyne was uttered.

To this there was no responsive "Here!" and looking up in surprise the adjutant repeated it in a louder voice.

Still no answer, and the Rangers looked at each other in dismay.

Had he deserted?

Although unwilling to believe it, they were at last obliged to do so, as he had not been injured during the skirmish of the previous night, and had laid down to sleep with the rest.

The adjutant continued to call the roll, every one answering until the last was named, and Dane Vincent starting from his reverie, advanced to the front and addressed them.

"Patriot Rangers," he said, "you have seen for yourselves that already treachery is at work in our ranks. William Wyne has proven himself a traitor to our noble cause. Remember the solemn oath we have all sworn, for if he cannot prove his perfect innocence, if he ever falls into our hands again, he dies."

A low murmur of approval along the ranks answered his words, and not wishing to weaken the effect by saying more, the young captain gave the order to resume the march.

It gave promise of being a glorious day, and all nature seemed to smile.

As they marched on, however, they more than once came to cruel blots upon the beauty of the landscape—the charred and blackened ruins of once happy homes, and the growing grain broken and trampled by the hoofs of the British troopers' horses.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, a terrific fire was opened upon them, and the next moment several hundred men leaped from their places of concealment behind rocks and bushes, and attacked the patriots.

A glance was sufficient to show that they belonged to the rival corps of the King's Rangers, and foremost among them was their captain, Lord Dane.

His father was a British peer, whose income not being equal to his pride and taste for display, had, nearly thirty years before, disposed of his estate in England, and receiving a grant of land in Pennsylvania, had transplanted his family and his title to the colonies.

As years went by, the value of the land granted to him had increased beyond his most sanguine expectations, and at the time of his death, which occurred about ten years before, it was, without exception, the most valuable property in the whole State.

At the time of the old peer's death his son had been a boy of about eight years old, and the circumstance of him so young becoming heir to his father's title and estate had not improved his naturally proud and overbearing disposition.

At the age of twelve his friends had procured for him a commission in the British army, and upon the first outbreak of

the revolution, when the King's Rangers were raised, he had applied for and received command of the corps.

Since that time, among the patriot colonists, his name had become synonymous with everything that was pitiless and cruel.

His rage had been particularly excited when he heard of the organization of the young Patriot Rangers, and he vowed that he would know no rest till he had annihilated them.

It was for this purpose that he had planned this deadly ambush, counting upon taking them unawares and gaining an easy victory.

In an instant Dane Vincent realized the death trap they had marched into, and rapidly gave the word of command to fall into fighting order more suitable to the ground on which they had been attacked.

His words, calm and cool, as if on dress parade, had the effect of restoring confidence to the patriots, and with the steadiness and precision of veterans, they executed the necessary evolutions.

The British, who had counted upon driving the patriots before them like a flock of sheep, were much disconcerted at this unexpected alacrity to receive them, and still further demoralized them when, at Dane Vincent's command to fire, a deadly volley was poured in among them, every bullet of which found its billet.

Swearing like a demon, Lord Dane gave the command to charge, and like rival torrents the two corps rushed to meet each other.

The loyalists, coming on in uneven order against the patriots' ranks, were dashed back from that line of solid steel like the angry waves from some adamant rock.

Retreating, they reformed their line, and once more charged.

This time they were more successful, and from that moment the skirmish became a series of hand-to-hand fights.

Each man singled out his adversary, equally determined never to yield.

Each was worthy of the other's steel, and as they fought, their faces set with a determination to conquer or die, notwithstanding their different complexions—the young nobleman with hair and eyes dark as midnight, and the patriot the type of some fair-haired Norse hero—it was hard to trace a resemblance between them.

Both were splendid swordsmen, and for a while it seemed doubtful who would prove the victor.

Lord Dane's blade snapped close to the hilt, and the moment his opponent had thrown him to the ground and was standing over him with his sword's point at his throat.

Dane Vincent's face was glowing with the excitement of the combat, and his voice was stern, as he cried:

"Surrender yourself my prisoner!"

"Curse you, never!"

"Then you die!" his victorious antagonist cried. "I have sworn to kill you, and I will!"

A savage laugh broke from between the prostrate nobleman's lips.

"No, you will not," he said; "at least, not by your hand, for it would be fratricide!"

Involuntarily the young patriot withdrew the point of his weapon from the other's throat in amazed bewilderment.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I am your brother."

CHAPTER IV.

A TRAITOR'S DOOM.

So suddenly and utterly unexpected had been the revelation that for the moment the young Patriot Ranger was thrown off his guard.

Involuntarily he stepped back a pace or two, while the point of his sword was removed from his prostrate opponent's throat.

Lord Dane was not slow to take advantage of the action.

In an instant he had regained his feet and seized the rival captain by the sword arm.

A sudden wrench of the wrist caused the weapon to drop from Dane Vincent's hand, and then the two clenched, and a desperate struggle began.

Both were models of physical perfection, and their limbs interlacing they strained every nerve and sinew in the gladiatorial contest.

All fraternal feelings forgotten, the hate of Cain burned in both their breasts, as with set teeth they endeavored to cast each other to the ground.

For several moments they struggled thus, neither gaining any decided advantage, when suddenly a force against which both were powerless hurled them asunder and almost insensible to the ground.

The fight had surged up to the spot where they stood, and the concussion of the two opposing parties had parted them.

Stunned by the force of the fall, for a few seconds Dane Vincent lay as if dead.

The moment was a critical one, and the turn of a hand either way might decide the victory.

The young Patriot Rangers, though full of enthusiasm, lacked that steadiness which is only acquired under fire, and which their opponents possessed.

Now, when they thought their leader had fallen, a panic began to take possession of them.

It was not cowardice—it was only inexperience and nervousness that the bravest soldiers in the world have felt when, for the first time, facing the enemy on the field.

For a moment or two they stood irresolute.

Another, and the crisis would have come, when Dane Vincent, recovering consciousness, staggered to his feet.

At a glance he took in the situation.

Seizing a sword from a fallen man, he dashed forward, and once more placed himself at their head.

"Patriot Rangers!" he cried. "Steady! Form! Forward! Charge!"

In clear, clarion tones his voice rang out, and a hearty cheer responded to the command.

His comrades, all the more sanguine now for their momentary hesitation, felt that the decisive moment had arrived, and like a resistless torrent they charged upon the enemy.

The loyalists stood their ground bravely, but against the revived enthusiasm of the patriots they were forced at last to give way, and inch by inch to retreat.

Their line wavered, and each man looked toward the other with an unspoken question in his eyes:

Where was their captain—Lord Dane?

He was nowhere to be seen—dead, probably, and as the thought flashed through the minds of his men they fell back in the greatest disorder, and finally took to their heels and ran for their lives.

All semblance of retreat was gone; it had become a regular rout.

The patriots, flushed with their victory, were about to follow, when the voice of their captain checked them.

"Halt!" he commanded. "We cannot afford to take any prisoners, except one, and I already have him safe."

His words had the effect of checking their impetuosity at once, and in obedience to his orders they again began to fall into line.

As they glanced towards him, however, an involuntary exclamation of surprise broke simultaneously from all their lips.

The prisoner Dane Vincent still held by the throat was none other than their deserting comrade, William Wyne.

He now no longer wore the uniform of the Rangers, but the epaulettes of a lieutenant in the British army.

Evidently the price paid for his treachery had not been a mean one, but as his eyes saw the expression upon the faces of the comrades he had betrayed he did not seem to enjoy it very much.

His face was blanched with terror, and his legs trembled so he could scarcely stand.

Calling a corporal's guard, Dane Vincent delivered the prisoner to them, and then proceeded to have the roll called.

Nearly twenty of the Rangers were wounded, and ten had been killed.

While the surgeon and his assistants were attending to the wounded, a fatigue party was detailed for the melancholy duty of digging a grave for their dead comrades.

In less than an hour their task was completed, and while the Rangers stood around with reversed arms and saddened hearts their captain, with head uncovered, read the burial service over the bodies of those young heroes who had laid down their lives for their country's good.

"They died in a glorious cause," Dane Vincent said, as the grave was being filled in. "Better a thousand times a death such as theirs was than the life of a traitor."

There was a stern and pitiless gleam in his eyes as he uttered the words that boded ill for the trembling wretch in charge of the corporal's guard.

A few minutes longer and the last sad rites were completed, the flag for which they had died was lowered reverently, and a parting volley fired over the grave.

Then once more the folds of the flag were shaken out, and the Rangers resumed their march.

Though he had not alluded to the fate of the traitor, Dane Vincent had by no means forgotten him.

Although he meant that his punishment should be swift and sure, he knew too well the danger of remaining in the gorge where they had been already surprised a moment longer than was absolutely necessary.

The safety of his men was in his hands, and he had no desire to run the risk of another attack in such a disadvantageous position for defense.

After marching for probably half an hour longer, however, he again commanded a halt.

Advancing to the front of the line, Dane Vincent explained the reason of the halt.

It was to hold a drum-head court-martial upon the prisoner.

In a few moments, under his directions, the Rangers had formed in a hollow square, in the center of which the officers stood grouped around the flag, while the drummers, with their drums unslung, stood behind them.

Seating himself with the order book on the head of a large drum before him, the captain called for the guard to produce the prisoner.

In a state of the most abject terror the traitor was brought before him, and stood tremblingly waiting to hear his doom.

His hopes, if ever he had entertained any, must have died out altogether as he saw the looks of execration cast upon him and heard the pitiless tone of the captain's voice, as he asked:

"William Wyne, you are accused before this court of deserting and carrying information to the enemy. What have you to say in your defense?"

For a moment or two the unhappy wretch did not answer, but looked wildly around him, as if searching for some means of escape.

"Mercy!" he gasped, at length. "I meant to keep my oath when I took it, but Lord Dane tempted me with the promise of a commission in the king's army. Pardon me this time and—"

"The prisoner confesses his guilt," interrupted Dane Vincent. "Adjutant, write it down in the order book."

Then rising, he addressed the listening Rangers:

"Comrades," he said, "it was with saddened hearts that we left our companions to their eternal rest in the valley where they fell, but their fate may be that of any of us to-morrow. It is the fortune of war, and when we tore down the flag of oppression, and devoted ourselves to hold, floating proud and free, before the world our own starry banner, we never dared to hope that all would live to see the glorious end achieved. We expected some of us would have to die, and we gave our lives up freely. We expected this, though we never expected to find a Judas in our ranks, but we have done so. He has confessed his guilt. Before the court pronounces the penalty, I ask what shall it be?"

For a moment after he had ceased speaking there was a breathless silence.

Then the voice of all the Rangers arose together in the one word:

"Death!"

Resuming his seat, Dane Vincent again turned over the leaves of the order book before him.

"The court pronounces him guilty," he said, and Wyne fell unconscious to the ground.

It was as yet but little past noon, and by the time appointed all arrangements for the execution were complete.

A shallow grave had been dug, and a hastily knocked-together coffin placed beside it.

There was something fearfully solemn in the scene—the coffin and the grave awaiting for the man in perfect health, the firing party of twelve loading their muskets at a distance, the figures of the Rangers standing in line, silent and motionless, as if carved out of stone.

More dead than alive, and quite speechless with terror, the unhappy wretch, still wearing the uniform he had received as the reward of his treachery, was brought forward and seated upon the edge of the coffin, while a handkerchief was tied tightly over his eyes; then with measured tread the firing party advanced and stood in double line, twelve paces distant.

"Ready—present—fire!"

Six weapons were leveled, six thin streams of fire shot forth, and with but a single shriek of mortal agony the traitor fell dead.

He had paid the penalty of his treachery, but its effects still lived, as the Rangers were destined soon to know.

Hardly had the reports of the firing party's muskets died away when they were echoed by those of the sentinels.

The cause of the alarm was easy to be seen.

Advancing upon them on the right was a detachment of Hessians; on the left a party of over a hundred of King George's Indian allies.

CHAPTER V.

A BRAVE GIRL.

When, upon the previous night, Dane Vincent had ridden back to Philadelphia, he had only waited long enough to see Alice safely inside the door of her father's house, and then had returned to the Rangers' camp.

He had congratulated himself that the girl he loved was safe, but could he have known of the events that transpired his feeling would have changed to the utmost disquietude.

The door had been opened by an old negro woman who had nursed Alice when a child, and who held up her hands in speechless amazement at her sudden appearance.

But she quickly explained all about her adventure of the night, and asked for her father.

The old negro woman told her her father was up in the library with two British officers, and as she listened to her a presentiment of evil took possession of the girl's mind.

She knew her father's ruling passion was love of money, and while he was too politic not to appear to lean towards the patriotic cause, she was well aware that he was at heart a loyalist.

She went to her own room, and seating herself by the window she tried to reason herself out of her fears, but it was impossible.

The strain of the excitement she had undergone since the previous afternoon, added to this new cause for disquiet, she gradually worked herself into a state of nervousness amounting almost to frenzy.

She felt that some unseen agency was urging her on, and utterly unable to resist the impulse she once more left her room, and stole noiselessly downstairs and along the hall to the library.

There was a small ante-chamber to the main apartment, and opening the door she entered it.

There was no communicating door, a heavy damask curtain taking its place, and drawing the folds slightly aside she could both see and hear every word they spoke.

"Then we can consider the matter settled, I suppose?" one of the officers said, addressing Mr. Allan. "By six o'clock to-morrow our spy will have reported to young Dane, and about ten he will surprise them. If he fails to overcome them before evening the Hessians and the Indians will attack them, and I think that will be the last of the young Patriot Rangers. They must be annihilated, or, better still, taken prisoners, but their enthusiasm may have a bad effect upon persons who have not yet rebelled, but are not loyal to the king."

Releasing her hold of the curtain, the listening girl staggered back, almost overcome by what she had heard.

"What her father's part in the bargain was to be she could not tell, but she knew the object was the destruction of the young patriots.

Was there no way to warn—to save them.

She asked herself the question again and again, without finding any answer.

At last a desperate resolve took possession of her.

She'd brave her father's wrath, and herself warn them of the danger.

She was a girl of rare strength of will, and once determined, immediately set about putting her resolve into execution. Leaving her hiding place, she descended the stairs to the closet where the keys of the outbuildings were kept, and passing out of the house crossed the courtyard to the stable.

Unlocking the door, she entered, and going to the stall where her own horse stood, in a few minutes she had placed the bridle and saddle upon him.

She was a splendid horsewoman, and as she well knew the speed of her horse, she calculated she could reach the Rangers' camp before daybreak.

Once fairly clear of the house she mounted and dashed at a gallop through the streets.

The city and the suburbs were soon passed, and she was fairly upon her journey.

By this time the sky was partially obscured by clouds, and a heavy mist gradually rising made it difficult to distinguish anything at any distance ahead.

Suddenly the girl reined in her horse with a feeling of apprehension in her breast.

The few dark objects she could discern through the mist and darkness seemed unfamiliar.

Had she lost her way?

Utterly absorbed in the purpose that animated her, it was more than possible she had taken the wrong road.

Dismounting, she led the horse by the bridle rein to where in the distance across the field she saw a light glimmering faintly through the darkness, thinking it might be some farmer's house where she could inquire her way.

Suddenly, however, the whoop of an owl broke the silence directly before her.

It was answered by two similar calls further on, and then four dark figures sprang from the ground at her very feet.

The horse, startled by their sudden appearance, started back, wrenching as he did so the rein from the girl's hand.

The next instant her arms were seized, and four dark-skinned faces, hidden with streaks of crimson paint, and surmounted with eagles' plumes, peered into her own.

Utterly overcome by the horror of her position, the poor girl uttered a single cry of terror, and then fainted.

CHAPTER VI.

A TERRIBLE ALTERNATIVE.

It was, indeed, a critical situation in which the young Patriot Rangers were now placed.

Exhausted by the fight of the morning, they were not in fit condition to encounter a new enemy.

Besides this, the approaching Hessians, together with the Indians, numbered about four men to their one.

Notwithstanding all this, the thought of surrendering never for an instant entered Dane Vincent's mind, and the sentiments of the captain were shared by every one under his command.

As yet the enemy were nearly half a mile distant, giving the young patriots time to make fitting preparations to receive them.

To think of doing so in the open country in which they stood would have been worse than madness, and dividing the troop into two divisions, the order to retreat was given.

The young captain's design in giving this command was to reach a fringe of woods about half a mile distant, which, once gained, would give them almost enough advantage over the attacking force to counterbalance the inequality of numbers.

The retreat was conducted so rapidly and in such perfect order, each division alternating in facing the enemy, that by the time the British force had advanced to within firing distance the patriots had gained the woods.

Scattering in skirmishing order, each Ranger picked out his man, and each firing steadily at the word of command, every bullet found its billet.

By the time the entire line of skirmishers had fired the first man had reloaded, and thus a continuous volley was kept up, which did fearful execution.

The Hessians answered the fire wildly, but sheltered by the timber their bullets did little harm to the patriots.

While they were thus engaged an officer on horseback, emerging from the woods fringing the pass in which the encounter between the rival Rangers had taken place, came dashing at a gallop towards the British force.

The Rangers recognized him as Lord Dane.

He spoke earnestly for several minutes to the group of officers, and when he had concluded a shout of approval broke from his hearers.

Evidently he had proposed some plan not thought of before, but what was it?

The answer was not long in coming.

Turning, the officer in command gave a few hurried orders, and immediately about a dozen Indians marched in front of the ranks.

They were evidently a guard over a prisoner, and that prisoner was a woman.

Dismounting, Lord Dane approached the Indian guard, and taking the prisoner by the arm advanced nearer the Rangers, and then, halting just beyond musket range, drew a pistol from his belt, and held it leveled at her head.

The Rangers looked wonderingly at this strange proceeding, but a cry of intensest agony broke from Dane Vincent's lips.

He recognized the prisoner instantly.

It was Alice Allan.

He staggered like a drunken man for a moment or two, hardly believing his eyes, and thinking he must be going mad.

Lord Dane's voice broke the silence.

"Listen, rebels," he cried. "I demand an exchange of prisoners. If it is not made instantly I will shoot this girl where she stands. I am out of your range at present, and if any one attempts to get me within it, so surely do I shoot the girl. The prisoner I demand is your self-elected captain, Dane Vincent. Deliver him up at once, and the girl is set at liberty. The rest of you can either also surrender yourselves prisoners of war or stay where you are, and when you are starved out be shot as rebels—that is left to your own choice. But your captain I demand before three counted minutes have passed, or I will shoot the girl. What is your answer?"

Never in his life had Dane Vincent been so sorely tried as at this audacious demand.

He knew too well the truth of Lord Dane's assertion, that once he was a prisoner the young Patriot Rangers were, as a corps, extinct.

He also knew the character of the titled scoundrel who had called himself his brother too well to doubt he would hesitate a moment to put his threat of murdering Alice Allan into execution.

His heart was torn by conflicting emotions.

How could he prove so base a traitor to his country and the oath he had sworn, as to abandon his comrades in danger and in the face of the enemy?

On the other hand, how could he stand helplessly by and see the girl he loved shot down before his eyes?

Again Lord Dane's voice called to his ears

"Two minutes and a half have passed," he said. "Thirty seconds more."

Only thirty seconds more, and Alice would either fall a corpse before his eyes, or he would be branded a traitor—be shot as a rebel, and dying bear the scorn of both friends and foes.

"Fifteen seconds!"

"Ten!"

"Five!"

There was no time for further hesitation. He must decide now or never!

Traitor he must be—should it be to his country or his love? It was a terrible alternative.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD SCOUT.

It was, indeed, a terrible position in which the young captain of the Patriot Rangers found himself placed.

Both the opposing forces understanding what a decision either way would cost, awaited in breathless silence—the warning silence that precedes a storm.

It was broken by Lord Dane's voice:

"The time is up," he said. "Have you decided?"

Dane Vincent hesitated no longer. Forgetting everything except that the life of the girl he loved hung upon the decision, he sprung from the shelter of the woods.

A laugh of mocking triumph rang from Lord Dane's lips. "I thought I should bring you to terms," he said. "Come on, then, rebel——"

But the sentence was never finished.

Ping!

It was the whistle of a bullet through the air, and with the mocking words dying away in a cry of mortal agony, Lord Dane fell forward on his face.

As he did so a tall, gaunt figure that seemed to have emerged from the very earth sprang to its feet and advanced to where the young girl was standing.

In one hand he carried a musket, and with the other arm he seized the girl around the waist, and lifting her as easily as if she had been a child dashed towards the woods where the young Rangers had sought shelter.

So utterly unexpected had been the whole incident that still for a few seconds both parties stood actually paralyzed with amazement.

The patriots were the first to recover themselves.

"Charge!" rang out their captain's voice, and emerging from the shelter of the woods they dashed towards the enemy.

By this time the mysterious personage whose shot had so opportunely saved the lives of both their captain and the girl had made more than half the distance to the timber, and in a few minutes more his retreat was covered by the Rangers' ranks.

Like an avalanche they dashed themselves against the British, and before their fiery enthusiasm the discipline of the Hessians and the ferocity of their Indian allies were as powerless to resist their onslaught as is some frail chalet in a mountain storm.

It was splendid—terrific—the far-famed charge of the light brigade upon the Russian guns at Balaklava was no more heroic than that of these young patriots against such overwhelming numbers.

The Hessians, not in proper order to withstand a charge, lost their heads, and fired wildly, disregarding their officers' commands, while the Indians, armed only with their hatchets and knives, went down like sheep before the bayonets of the Rangers.

A charmed life Dane Vincent seemed to bear, as, everywhere in the thickest of the fight, he was seen encouraging and cheering on his men, while his sword flashed a perfect circle of death around him.

Suddenly seizing the bugle from one of the buglers who went down beside him, he sounded the retreat.

It was a dangerous proceeding, but his faith in his men was not misplaced, and it worked like a charm.

The Rangers at once fell back in perfect order, but the Hessians, most of whom knew no word of English and trusted implicitly to the bugle calls, thought it was their own officers who had given the command.

They also at once began to fall back, and before the mistake could be restified the young patriot had again halted and formed his men.

The distance between them was less than pistol range, and as in obedience to his orders they sent a volley into the already wavering ranks of the enemy, not a bullet missed its man.

Again he gave the command to charge, and once more they dashed upon the demoralized hirelings.

The result was victory.

With one accord they turned, and throwing away their weapons as they did so, Hessians and Indians vied with each other as to which could make the best use of their legs.

Now that the victory was assured, but one question filled the minds of every one with eager curiosity.

Who was the singular personage whose timely shot had so completely turned fortune in their favor?

By whatever name he might be called, the nearest comparison of his appearance at the present day would be that of some solitary settler upon the very confines of civilization.

His dress consisted solely of a gray homespun shirt and breeches, with a broad leather strap buckled around his waist.

A huge cap, worn to the skin in many places, surmounted his shaggy, iron-gray hair, while a pair of untanned hide moccasins with leggings reaching to his knees covered his feet.

Dane Vincent turned to him, and said:

"To you, my friend, is due this victory to-day. May I ask what is your name?"

"I'm known as Old Huckleberry."

An expression of utmost surprise left his hearer's lips.

"Washington's famous scout?" he asked.

"The same, at your service. But, at the same time, don't say it so loud. You kin never tell who's around in the woods."

Dane Vincent's brow became clouded in thought, and for a few minutes he stood in silence.

At last, turning to Alice, he asked

"And you, dearest, what are you going to do?"

"It is impossible for me to return to my father's house," she replied. "He would disown me."

"Not return?" he repeated in surprise. "What else can you do?"

"I don't know, but I cannot return home again."

"The sentiment is worthy of you, Alice, but you must return. Wait here a while with our friend the scout. I will return in a few minutes."

As Dane Vincent walked away the old scout drew near.

"Are you really determined, Miss Allan, never to return to your father's house?" he asked

It was the girl's turn to stand in utter surprise, not only at the fact of his knowing her name, but at the utter change in his voice and manner, which were now those of a perfect gentleman.

"It is impossible now, after my unexplained absence that I ever can," she answered.

"Then I will aid you. Can you trust me?"

Alice Allan looked into his eyes a moment, and then held out her hand.

"I think—I'm sure I can."

She had promised the scout to trust him, and although this sudden determination took her by surprise, she was equally determined to keep her word.

A long time before Dane Vincent would give his consent to all to this resolve, but at last, by Alice's pleadings, he was induced to do so, though still very reluctantly.

Then, after partaking of refreshments, of which they stood much in need, the old scout and the girl rode through the lines of the camp into the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISONERS.

For some time, with the girl's bridle rein linked in his, the old scout rode along in utter silence.

Suddenly the old scout checked his horse and listened.

"We are followed," he said in a hoarse whisper. "We must urge our horses faster."

For a quarter of an hour or more they rode on until their horses began to show signs of exhaustion, when they again pulled up.

"They are gaining on us," he said. "In less than half an hour they will be up with us. We must dismount and go on foot. It is our only chance."

They were in a sort of wooded dell, with the trees growing so

close on either side of the road as to almost meet above, and assisting the girl to the ground, he removed the bridles and saddles, and throwing them among the undergrowth set the animals at liberty.

Then holding the girl's hand in his own he struck into the woods.

In a few moments he could hear the pursuing party approach the spot where they had left the horses, and after pausing a moment or two rode on again.

Evidently his ruse had been successful, and they had taken the horses to be stray animals escaped from pastures.

The ground at the spot, where the two fugitives had entered the woods arose steeply to a sort of bluff, the sides of which were covered with undergrowth, and they at once began to climb the ascent.

No sooner had they done so, than about a quarter of a mile distant they could easily discern the fires of a bivouac.

Almost at the same moment, on the road they had left, were again heard the sound of horses' hoofs.

It was the pursuing party returning slowly, and from the eminence on which they stood the scout and the girl could plainly hear them talking together.

"They must be somewhere around here," one was saying. "Those were their horses we thought were stray ones. They have not passed the guard below, and their retreat is cut off by the way they came. Beyond they cannot pass the camp, and we will wait here until daylight, when we shall be sure to catch them. The girl I will have, by Heaven, and the old fellow will hang."

Both of the concealed listeners started as they heard the words, and recognized the voice of the speaker.

It was Lord Dane.

The old scout ground his teeth at the knowledge that his shot had missed, and at the thought of the trap he and his companion were in.

Still he did not despair, and whispering a few words of encouragement he was far from sharing to the girl, he once more took her hand, and began making his way carefully to try and get past the guard which Lord Dane had said was posted below.

Suddenly, however, the skirt of Alice's dress caught among some of the dry twigs upon the ground.

The next moment a whistle sounded shrilly on the night air, and nearly a dozen men sprang from the undergrowth, confronting them.

The old scout fought furiously for a few moments, but at last he had to succumb to the force of numbers, and he was hurried towards the camp.

As they reached it the party was joined by Lord Dane and his companions.

"Why did you trouble yourselves to make this fellow a prisoner?" he asked, addressing the captors. "He is a spy. Hang him at once."

Old Huckleberry answered with a mocking laugh.

"They will not hang me," he answered, "because they have no orders to do so. You are only a captain, and Colonel Campbell, if I mistake not, is in charge of this detachment. Take me to him at once. I have something to say to him."

As he finished speaking an officer wrapped in a military cloak approached the group.

"I am Colonel Campbell," he said. "Let me hear what you have to say."

"What I have to say is to yourself alone."

"No trifling, fellow," the British officer said angrily. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"My name is Old Huckleberry, and I want to deliver you dispatches from Lord Howe."

At the words Colonel Campbell's manner changed instantly. "Release him at once," he said. "As for you, Lord Dane, you

have overstepped your duty and will consider yourself under arrest. Follow me, Scout."

As Alice Allan stood watching this strange change of manner upon the scout's mere mention of his name all doubts she had before returned with redoubled force, and her heart sank like lead in her breast.

What did it mean?

Who was this strange man in whom she had placed her trust?

Was he really a traitor, or was he only playing a part?

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH.

After Old Huckleberry and Alice Allan had left the camp, Dane Vincent passed a restless night.

Had he done right in thus allowing her to go without any further protection? was the question he asked himself again and again.

His imagination pictured up a thousand accidents that might befall her, until at last, wearied out in mind and body he fell asleep.

No alarm occurred during the night, and at the break of day the Rangers resumed their march.

All day they saw signs of the ruthless work of the Hessians and Indians, but fell in with none of them.

By dusk they had reached within five miles of Trenton.

Here they again made their camp.

His mind still disturbed by thoughts of Alice Allan, Dane Vincent slept restlessly.

Suddenly he fancied he heard a noise as of some one moving in the tent.

Starting to his feet, he looked out into the night.

There was nothing, however to confirm his suspicions, and the measured tread of sentinels was the only sound audible.

Satisfied it had been a mere half-dreaming fancy, he once more lay down to sleep.

All thoughts of slumber seemed to have vanished, however, and he still was lying wide awake when the noise that had before startled him was repeated.

This time he did not spring to his feet as he had done before, but lay quietly awaiting further developments.

After the lapse of probably five minutes he saw the curtain of his tent raised, and something that looked like a human head peering into the interior.

Waiting no longer, he sprang from his recumbent position, and seizing his sword, rushed out of the doorway just in time to catch sight of a dark figure gliding away, snake-like, through the darkness.

For a moment he was on the point of calling out the guard to seize the intruder, but the next moment he restrained himself.

A love of adventure was one of Dane Vincent's most marked characteristics, and he determined to solve the mystery of this nocturnal visitor alone.

Still crawling along on the ground like a huge serpent, he passed the sentinel unobserved, and Dane Vincent, giving the password, followed.

For several hundred yards further the pursuer and pursued went on in the same way, and then the latter starting to his feet, made off at a run for a belt of woods about a quarter of a mile distant.

The young patriot captain had no doubt that he was an Indian spy, and utterly forgetting all caution, he started in pursuit.

That act was one of madness, of which in a cooler moment he would never have dreamed.

Hardly had he penetrated ten feet among the shadows of the trees when he received a stunning blow upon the back of the head, and with the whole firmament of stars revolving before his eyes he sank unconscious to the ground.

When he again came to himself he found his hands and feet tied together, and he lay upon the ground beside the smouldering embers of a bivouac fire.

Bitterly he regretted now his foolhardiness as he realized his position.

He was a prisoner in the hands of the enemy.

Directly in front of him sat an officer in the British uniform, with a face almost as red as his coat, while near by stood more than a dozen privates.

"Has the prisoner come to his senses yet?" the officer asked impatiently.

One of the men bending down and examining his face answered in the affirmative.

"Stand him on his feet before me then," was the next order, and the young man was roughly assisted to rise.

"You are accused of being a spy," the officer said, "and you are condemned to be hung. What have you to say for yourself?"

"I am not a spy," said Dane Vincent, proudly. "I am a commissioned officer in the patriot ranks, and in command of a detachment of Rangers."

"You are a rebel, anyhow," was the brutal answer. "How dare you bandy words with me? If you have any prayers to say, say them quickly. I will give you five minutes."

"Thank you for that courtesy," the young patriot replied, with sarcastic politeness, "but I could not think of taking up your valuable time. If you are going to murder me do it at once."

At this reply the Britisher's face became almost black from fury.

"Lose no time!" he cried, turning to his men. "If he is not strung up within two minutes, I will place you all under arrest."

That the bully was quite capable of keeping his word was evident from the haste which the men made to obey his orders.

"What are you waiting for?" cried the irascible bully, with a sulphurous oath. "Swing him up, and if you let him fall I will have every man of you court-martialed."

Already the men had hold of the rope, and at these words they pulled upon it together.

One last, lingering look Dane Vincent took at the beauty of the dawn of the last day that ever was to break for him.

Then a mist, as of blood, came before his vision, and all was blank.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

Was Old Huckleberry indeed a traitor, or was he only playing a part?

In an agony of doubting fear Alice Allan repeated the question to herself as the old scout and the British officer drew apart in earnest conversation.

With straining eyes watching their every motion, at last she saw the scout place his hand in his breast, and drawing forth a sealed paper, give it to his companion.

She could no longer doubt she had been betrayed.

Breaking the seal, Colonel Campbell stood perusing the contents for some time in silence.

Colonel Campbell was a rare exception to the officers of the British army, and reproved Lord Dane for having acted as he did, that officer going away in a huff.

Now, as he addressed the girl he bowed with courtly courtesy.

"I am sorry to find you placed in such an unpleasant position, Miss Allan," he said, "and more so that you have experienced such treatment from any one wearing his majesty's uniform. I beg of you to have no fear now that you are under my protection, and in the course of a day or two I hope to be able to find a sufficient escort to accompany you safely back to your father's house."

By this time the dawn had broken, and the clear saffron of the sky, pierced by the shafts of deeper gold, gave promise of a beautiful day.

Soon the reveille sounded, and the troopers springing to their feet began to prepare for the day's march.

When the rough meal was ready a portion was brought to Alice, but she could hardly prevail upon herself to even taste it.

Her attention was too occupied by the movements of the old scout, who was lingering near, as if trying to get an opportunity to speak to her unobserved.

At last he was successful, for while passing by where she sat he whispered a few words to her.

"I am not the traitor you take me to be," he said. "Still continue to trust me, and all will be well."

She had no time to reply, for before the full meaning of the words had penetrated her mind he had joined Colonel Campbell, and a few minutes later, with his rusty musket under his arm, she saw him stealing away like a shadow in the shelter of the trees.

Soon after the regiment started to move.

The officers showed Alice every attention in their power, and procured her fresh milk and other delicacies from the farmhouses as they passed, but one thought continued to fill the girl with apprehension.

They were not marching to Philadelphia, but from it, towards New York.

She seemed to be entangled in a net of mystery which she could neither unravel nor understand.

Then, too, there was the unexplained conduct of the old scout.

She did not wish to believe him a traitor, yet to what other conclusion could his actions point?

It was too late for regrets now, but she determined that if the last opportunity offered itself she would seize it, and endeavor to escape.

Day passed, however, without any opportunity offering.

A tent was erected for the girl's accommodation, and an improvised couch made for her with half a dozen blankets.

Assuring her that on the following day he hoped to meet with a detachment proceeding towards Philadelphia, in whose care he would place her, the British colonel bade her good night and left her to repose.

Sleep, however, refused to visit the girl's eyes, and she lay awake until it was past midnight, and only the measured tread of the sentinels broke the silence.

Suddenly a thought flashed through her mind that caused a great, wild hope to leap to life in her heart.

The young Patriot Rangers were also marching towards New York, and if it had chanced they had taken the same line of march they must be encamped within a few miles.

The more she pondered over the idea the more she became impressed with the resolve to attempt to escape and join them, and springing from the improvised couch she drew aside the curtain of the tent, and peered out into the night.

It was very dark, the sky being covered with clouds, while a heavy mist made it impossible to see more than a dozen yards ahead—only the light of the bivouac fires were visible

through the gloom, and drawing the curtain still further aside she passed out of the tent.

Crouching upon the ground she waited for a few moments, listening intently.

From the sound of their footsteps she could tell what points the sentries were posted, and hardly daring to breathe she crawled along on the ground towards the limit of the camp.

After a lapse of a few minutes, each one of which seemed an hour to her excited imagination, she passed the outlines of the camp without being discovered, and could hear the measured paces of the sentries tramping on their beats behind her.

For a moment or two the reaction of her wrought-up nerves seemed about to overpower her, but exerting all her strength of will she recovered herself and hurried along the road as fast as she could.

For nearly an hour she hurried on, when the glimmer of distant fires warned her she was approaching a bivouac.

She stopped short, and again the reaction of her feelings threatened to overpower her, as a new fear took possession of her mind.

What if she had escaped from one danger only to encounter another, and the camp whose fires shone ahead of her was not those of the Patriot Rangers, but a detachment of the British?

Dare she run the risk of alarming them, only to find herself a prisoner?

With this question also came another that called a faint flush to her cheek, and she felt there was nothing to do but wait until daylight, when her doubts would be resolved into a certainty.

She would not have long to wait, for already a streak of light was in the east, and she determined to seek the shelter of a fringe of woods that lay about a quarter of a mile from the camp.

Here, she thought, she could lay concealed, and accordingly, she bent her steps towards the trees.

She had no sooner reached their shelter, however, than the sound of voices came upon her ear, and, rendered almost desperate by this new calamity, the girl crouched upon the ground in terror.

The speakers were evidently but a few yards distant, and cautiously approaching nearer. She parted the foliage with her hands and peered through.

She gazed upon a scene before her with a sort of horrified fascination.

More than two dozen soldiers wearing the red uniform of the British, were standing around an unconscious man, who lay beside the smoldering embers of the fire.

While she still looked an officer approached, and commanded the soldiers to raise the prostrate man to his feet; as they did so the dull glow of the dying fire fell upon his face.

In spite of the danger of her own position, a cry of agony half broke from the girl's lips as she recognized the features. They were those of her lover, Dane Vincent.

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERY.

The captain of the young Patriot Rangers was certainly in a tight place.

Already the brutal command of the British officer had been obeyed, and his feet swung clear from the ground.

Then came a blank—utter unconsciousness.

Gradually, however, his senses began to return, and he experienced a sensation similar to falling from a great height; then a sound like a volley of musketry rang in his ears.

Opening his eyes and gazing around him in a dazed sort of way for a moment or two, he staggered to his feet to find himself surrounded by the Patriot Rangers.

More than a dozen of the British lay dead or wounded on the ground, while the remainder, among whom was the bully who commanded them, were prisoners.

In an instant he took in the situation.

His gallant rangers had arrived just in the nick of time to rescue him from an ignominious death, and they now all crowded around with their congratulations on his narrow escape.

But how had they known of his danger?

"We were warned by Miss Allan. She came flying into the camp and narrowly escaped being shot by the sentries. You may be sure, when we heard her story, we lost no time; but even with all our haste, we were not a moment too soon."

For a few moments Dane Vincent stood actually paralyzed with amazement, and hardly believing his ears.

"Miss Allan—Alice!" he gasped. "Impossible."

"It was either she or her spirit," was the lieutenant's reply; "and she is in the camp now. She seemed very agitated and exhausted, and no sooner had she told us of your danger than she sank fainting to the ground; but knowing the predicament you were in there was no time to try and restore her."

"She must be attended to at once," Dane Vincent said. "Where is the surgeon? Send him instantly! How many prisoners have you taken?"

"About thirty, and with the dead and wounded makes up their whole number. They were but an advance guard of a larger detachment."

"March them to the camp," the captain said, and while the lieutenant was forming the Rangers in order to carry out the command, he accompanied the surgeon who had been dispatched to attend to Alice.

He was burning with eagerness to learn what could have brought the girl there at such a time, but in this desire he was doomed to be disappointed.

Not the least trace of her could be found.

"It is very mysterious, certainly!" the lieutenant said, when, with the rest of the Rangers, he had reached the camp. "She cannot have been made a prisoner. She must certainly be near."

At last, when two hours had passed without her being found, the search had to be relinquished in despair.

She was gone—vanished without leaving a trace behind.

That she had been made a prisoner seemed improbable, as had she been so her captors would hardly have had time to make good their escape without being discovered; still, had she departed alone, where had she gone to?

It was a mystery to which there was no solution, and at last Dane Vincent reluctantly gave the command to form in marching order.

The prisoners were disarmed and set at liberty, and once more the Rangers resumed their march.

The subject was discussed until more than one began to believe that it had not been the girl at all, but her spirit who had warned them of their captain's danger; but the captain himself could not accept the solution of the mystery, and his breast was racked with anxiety as to her fate.

On the evening of the 11th of July, seven days after leaving Philadelphia, they reached Washington's headquarters.

Three days previously the Declaration of Independence had been read by the commander-in-chief to the assembled army, and their enthusiasm was unbounded.

The reception of the Patriot Rangers was a perfect ovation.

The patriot army, drawn up in order of review, received them with all possible military honors, and Washington, addressing

them, complimented them highly on their patriotism and valor.

When their quarters had been assigned them, and preparations for encamping completed, Dane Vincent was surprised to hear a visitor wished to see him.

His surprise expanded to the utmost amazement upon recognizing the scout, Old Huckleberry.

He still wore the same dilapidated apparel, and carried his old trusty musket upon his arm.

Dane Vincent immediately asked the question nearest his heart:

"Where is the young lady, Miss Allan, who was given into your care?" he asked.

"Waal, now," he answered, "you're askin' too much. As near as I kin calculate it was three days ago since I saw her."

"Three days ago," Dane Vincent answered. "Why, that was the day after her mysterious disappearance."

The old scout did not appear to understand this reference, and did not make any reply, while the young Ranger also stood for a moment or two without saying anything.

"See here," he said at length, "how do I know you are telling me the truth?"

"Waal, I've got somethin' here as will prove it."

"What is it?"

"A letter."

Old Huckleberry deliberately placed his hand in an inner pocket of his homespun shirt, and taking out a letter gave it to the young man, who tore it eagerly open and read its contents, which were as follows:

"My Dear Friend:—To return to my father's house was an impossibility, but do not be anxious on my account, for I am well and among friends. Do not seek to question the old scout, for he knows nothing. How thankful I am that I was able to save you from such a fearful death last night! Perhaps when you least expect it you may see me again, and until then may God preserve you is my constant prayer."

The letter was signed simply "Alice," and was dated the day of her mysterious disappearance from the rangers' camp. More puzzled than ever, the young man turned to question Old Huckleberry, but he had vanished.

Again he perused the letter.

What did it mean?

The mystery was growing deeper.

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTURED.

For nearly six weeks the young Patriot Rangers remained in garrison with the forces under Washington, and during that time, try as he would, Dane Vincent could never contrive to speak alone with Old Huckleberry.

The scout was seldom in camp for more than an hour or two at a time, and during those periods it appeared as if he systematically avoided the young man.

The day following the Rangers' arrival the British fleet under Lord Howe, had entered the Narrows, and lay at anchor between Long and Staten Islands.

No hostile demonstration was made, and it seemed as if the British commander intended to throw the patriots off their guard by an assumption of indolent inactivity.

At last, however, on the 22d day of August, the British forces under Sir Henry Clinton landed, and the disastrous battle of Long Island ensued.

Against a force of twenty-two thousand disciplined troops,

is it any wonder that a force of less than seventeen thousand were compelled to retreat, as nearly three-quarters of them were raw recruits.

On the night of the 19th of August, two days before the main force disembarked, a strong detachment of engineers landed, and throwing up an earthen breastwork mounted twelve cannon of heavy calibre upon it.

From the fact of this preparation it was evident that the British meditated making a landing at last, and the advantage thus given them was incalculable.

Covered by the guns they would be enabled to land and form their forces without molestation.

This, General Sullivan, in whose division the Rangers had been placed, was not slow to see.

"They have stolen a march upon us," he said, as he and his staff rode out to reconnoitre. "Without that battery they would be entirely at our mercy. With it we are at theirs."

"But if it were in our hands, general?" Dane Vincent, who was serving temporarily on the staff, asked impulsively.

"It might change the whole issue of the campaign," he said, after a pause, "but I see no way by which such a desirable result can be accomplished."

"But I do," the young Ranger captain answered. "It shall be ours to-morrow, or," he added under his breath, "the Rangers will have to elect a new captain."

As they returned to the camp the general rode twenty or thirty yards in advance of his staff, and summoned Dane Vincent to attend him.

"What did you mean by that remark?" he asked. "You surely did not think of carrying it at the point of the bayonet?"

"No," was the answer, "I would not lead my men on to such certain death. I alone will do it to-night. I will spike the guns and then carry it by surprise."

The general looked at the young man with undisguised admiration.

"I would ask no man to undertake that task," said the general, but since you have volunteered, my good wishes and those of the whole patriot army go with you."

By this time the camp was reached, and Dane Vincent at once began making preparations for his desperate undertaking.

By the time his preparations were complete it was quite dark, and a dreary, drizzling rain was falling, evidently making up for a bad night.

He worked until midnight should arrive.

It was late, and passing out of the limits of the camp, he went in this way in the direction of the British battery.

The night was favorable for the work he had in hand; the rain came down in torrents, and the darkness was so intense that he could hardly see his hand when held before his face.

After the lapse of an hour he reached the battery, and could hear the measured tread of the sentinel upon the rampart above him.

Crawling noiselessly inch by inch to the top, he crouched down and waited until the soldier's back was turned.

Then springing upon him, he seized him by the throat, and bore him heavily to the ground.

"Move, or utter a single word, and you are a dead man," he said, in a stern voice, as he spoke shifting one hand and pressing the cold muzzle of a pistol against the prisoner's forehead.

The warning was needless, for the sentry was too terrified to make any attempt at resistance, and thrusting a gag between his teeth, Dane Vincent rapidly bound his hands and feet so that the slightest movement was impossible.

Then leaving him lying there, he leaped over the parapet, and groping through the darkness for the vent of the cannon, placed a spike in it, and drove it home.

The first gun was spiked.

The leather-covered mallet made no sound as the spike was

driven home, and groping through the darkness he spiked the next and the next and so on until only one remained.

He reached it and raised the mallet to drive the spike home, when suddenly he was struck heavily and dashed to the ground, and he felt a heavy foot upon his breast, the cold muzzle of a musket pressing against his forehead.

In an instant he realized his scheme had been foiled in the very moment of success, and he was a prisoner in the hands of the enemy.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS DELIVERANCE.

With his captor's heel upon his breast and the muzzle of the musket pressing against his forehead, to dream of resistance would have been worse than madness.

Though braver than most men, Dane Vincent was not a fool, and no one but a fool will willingly throw away his life.

He was not afraid to meet death in any form, even the ignominious one meted out to a spy, but he saw no reason why he should hasten to meet it.

His captor had already given the alarm, and in a few seconds he was surrounded by the guard.

He was seized and hurried towards the tent of the major of the artillery.

The major, wrapped in a cloak, had been asleep, and it was with an angry frown that he addressed the officer of the night who aroused him.

"What do you mean by disturbing me in this way?" he asked.

"We have taken a prisoner, sir," he answered.

The major's expression of ill-humor vanished, and he became all interest at once.

"A prisoner," he repeated, "taken within the lines. Keep him safely guarded, and summon the officers for a court-martial at once."

The officer proceeded immediately to carry out the order, and in a few minutes they had all assembled in the major's tent, while Dane Vincent stood with a guard on either side of him.

"Prisoner, your name?" the major asked.

"Dane Vincent, captain of the Patriot Rangers."

"Then you admit you are a rebel against the authority of his most gracious majesty, King George?"

The young patriot's tone was proud and defiant, as he answered:

"I recognize no King George but as a foreign monarch. I am an American."

At this bold reply the face of the officer crimsoned with rage.

"None of your insolence here, you infernal rebel," he cried. "Answer the questions of the court respectfully. What were you doing within this fort?"

"I was doing what I came to do, and what I had nearly finished. I came to spike the guns."

"There is no use wasting any more time with this fellow," the major said, turning to the rest of the officers. "Gentlemen, what is his sentence?"

"Death as a spy!" came the answer.

Instead of at once signifying his approval, the major sat in deep thought for a moment or two.

"Gentlemen," he said at length, "the sentence is just, but under the circumstances I think we had better defer putting it into execution until it is approved by the commander-in-chief. Guard, remove the prisoner, and be careful that he does not escape."

The guards dragged their prisoner to the parapet, and fastening his feet together placed a guard over him.

The morning broke clear, and at last the sun arose with every promise of a beautiful day.

Even before it had done so, from the ships lying in the stream the British began to disembark and make a landing.

The day wore away until it was noon; the sun poured down with scorching heat, and the tightly tied cords on the young patriot's wrists and ankles began to cause the most excruciating pain.

His captors' treatment was brutal in the extreme, and not so much as a drop of water was offered to quench his burning thirst.

Towards sundown heavy clouds began to bank up on the horizon, and the night once more fell dark and gloomy.

The usual sentinels were posted, while an extra one was detailed specially to watch over the prisoner, and gradually only the sound of the measured tread of these watchers broke the silence.

Away to the eastward could be seen the glimmer of the British bivouac fires, while the patriot forces, hidden from view by the wooded heights, lay to the westward.

As the night passed on the sentries were changed at regular intervals, but the one that had been posted especially over the prisoner was not relieved.

As Dane Vincent watched him closely he saw he was gradually growing drowsy, until at last, stopping in his march, he sat down and rested his musket on his knees.

He had sat there for probably a quarter of an hour, when the guard again being changed, he started to his feet to resume his march.

His activity was only temporary, however, for but a few moments had elapsed after the guard had passed on before he again sat down.

Gradually his head drooped on his breast, and after a few feeble struggles against the drowsiness, he fell fast asleep.

At this tantalizing chance, of which he was utterly powerless to take any advantage, a moan of despair half left Dane Vincent's lips.

If his hands were only free, he thought, he might even yet make his escape.

He exerted all his strength to snap the cords that held his wrists, but they resisted all his efforts, and he was relinquishing the vain endeavor with a feeling of despair, when he felt the touch of a soft hand upon his face.

Looking up in surprise, he saw a female figure bending over him.

Before he had time to utter a word he saw a knife flash in her hand, and the cords that bound him were severed.

"Lose no time," his mysterious deliverer whispered, "but secure the sentry."

She thrust the knife with which she had cut the bonds into his hand as she spoke, and needing no second bidding, the young patriot crawled nearer to the sleeping soldier.

The next instant he had seized him, and held the knife against his throat.

"Utter so much as a sound, and you die!" he hissed, in a stern voice.

The soldier evidently had no intention of doing so, and while Dane Vincent still kept his grip upon his throat the mysterious female had dexterously bound his hands and feet, and thrust a gag between his teeth.

"Now let us hasten from here," she whispered. "Follow me."

She glided along a little distance in the shelter of the parapet, and then crouched in the shadow of one of the embrasures.

A sentry was pacing up and down not a dozen feet away, and waiting until his face was turned in the opposite direction,

with a motion for her companion to follow her she dropped lightly into the ditch below.

For a moment or two they both crouched on the ground where they had fallen until the sentry had again reached the end of his beat, when they arose to their feet and started rapidly for the shelter of the woods.

Once inside the fort it was impossible to discern their figures through the darkness, and in less than a quarter of an hour the woods were reached.

Up to this time the rescued prisoner had been too completely carried away by surprise for words, but now he began to express his thanks.

His mysterious companion interrupted him.

"You owe me none," she said, in a voice low and musical, "and we have no time for words, for the patriot camp is yet a mile away."

For more than a quarter of an hour longer they hurried on in silence, when the female again stopped.

"Now you are safe," she said. "Adieu."

"But stay——" he was beginning when his voice died away in utter bewilderment.

His mysterious visitor had vanished.

Had she taken wings, or had the earth swallowed her up?

"I am one of the handmaidens of the goddess, and I watch over the fortunes of the patriot cause."

The voice came faintly from the distance, and utterly overcome with amazement, Dane Vincent stood, almost believing he was in a dream.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNAVAILING WARNING.

"Who goes there?"

The sound of the sentry's challenge aroused Dane Vincent from his stupefaction, and recalled his wandering thoughts.

Hastily making himself known, he entered the camp and at once reported to the general.

The Rangers welcomed him back with unbounded enthusiasm, and the strange story of his escape was passed around the camp and recalled to remembrance the former warning of his danger they had received from the girl who had afterwards so mysteriously disappeared.

The two coincidences in the minds of more than one of them strengthened the belief that in both cases his deliverance had been supernatural.

But this solution would not satisfy Dane Vincent, and his mind was filled with a thousand doubts and fears.

It was impossible that it could be Alice, he told himself, but this repetition in no way relieved his anxiety.

There was, however, no time now to investigate it, and by the time he had partaken of some refreshments, of which he stood greatly in need, the day had begun to break, and the camp was on the alert.

The patriots were in hourly expectation of an attack, and the division under General Sullivan had been supplemented by six regiments under General Putnam.

Suddenly through the morning air rang the sharp, clear challenge of the sentries.

Starting from the ground, where, wrapped in a heavy cloak, he lay endeavoring to catch an hour's sleep, Dane Vincent saw, warned off by the sentinel's bayonet, the woman who rescued him the night before.

She waited until he reached within a few yards of where she stood, and then with a gesture of her hand she motioned him to halt.

"The pass to the east," she cried, in clear, ringing tones, "is

unprotected, and the British are already advancing towards it. Lose no time in occupying it, or it will be too late."

Again she waved her hand, and turning, vanished mysteriously in the morning mist.

Dane Vincent was too startled by her information to think of losing time in attempting to follow her.

He too well understood the advantage of having possession of the pass in question.

It was the only means of communication between the sites of occupation of the two armies, and its value to either could hardly be calculated.

At his utmost speed the young Ranger made his way to the general's tent, and reported the lamentable oversight.

The general heard it with surprise, and at once sent four regiments to occupy the pass, and at least endeavor to hold the enemy in check until reinforcements should arrive.

But the warning and the order came too late.

Already the British had it in their hands, and the fact turned the fortune of the day, and caused history to record a defeat instead of a victory.

The patriots fought like heroes, but with the concentrated forces of the enemy pouring through the defile their advance guards were driven back, though disputing bravely every inch of ground.

There are defeats that are greater than victory, and this was one of them.

All day long until the sun went down the patriots, most of them raw, inexperienced recruits, badly armed and equipped, and upheld only by the patriotic fire that burned in their breasts, contended with an overwhelming force of disciplined troops, with the advantage of position added to their experience, until at last Washington gave the order to retreat.

Hardly had they reached the opposite shore of the East River, then they saw the ground on which they had stood not half an hour before occupied by the British.

By what might almost seem a special interposition of Providence, the retreat had been accomplished, but not before many a noble heart had ceased its pulsation forever.

CHAPTER XV.

BETWEEN TWO DOOMS.

Their temporary success the British did not seem inclined to test the metal of the patriots again, but contented themselves with making formidable-looking preparations on the opposite bank of the river.

In the patriot camp the greatest activity prevailed, reorganizing the regiments that had suffered most severely, and bringing them up to a higher state of discipline.

The young Patriot Rangers, though they had been in the foremost of the fight, had lost fewer men than might have been supposed, and they soon grew wearied of the routine of garrison duty, and longed for another opportunity to encounter the foe.

During the two or three weeks that followed Dane Vincent had ample opportunity to indulge in his thoughts.

They were far from pleasant ones.

In the first place, there was the still unexplained mystery of Alice Allan's fate.

Old Huckleberry had not been in camp since the battle, and the young man had no means of finding out anything about her.

Last, but not least, were the words of the captain of the King's Rangers when he avowed himself his brother.

Was it possible that it could be so? Or was it only an in-

genious ruse resorted to by the young nobleman to enable him to make his escape from his perilous position?

How Dane Vincent longed once more to be face to face with him, and brother or no brother, at the point of the sword force him to explain his words.

The opportunity came sooner than he could have hoped.

News was brought to the camp one day that a detachment of the enemy had crossed the river several miles further up, and a small party, numbering about thirty of the Rangers, under command of their captain, was detailed to reconnoitre and ascertain the truth of the rumor.

It was about noon when they passed the limits of the camp, and in less than two hours had reached the locality mentioned as the one where the British had landed.

The closest search and the most diligent inquiries could discover no trace of them, and at last coming to the conclusion that the report was false, they prepared to return to the camp.

Suddenly, however, from behind the shelter of a small hill rang out the notes of a bugle call, and the next instant a body of troops came into view.

They wore the red uniform of the British, and at the sight of the captain who rode at their head Dane Vincent knew them to be the King's Rangers.

Lord Dane had obeyed the order delivered to Colonel Campbell by Old Huckleberry, and raising the original number of his men to more than double, had joined the main army.

The corps now numbered more than four hundred.

No sooner had he caught sight of Dane Vincent and his handful of men than an exultant cry left his lips, and giving some command to his men, he drew his sword and spurred on his horse toward them.

His men also came on a run.

In an instant Dane Vincent realized his position.

He knew it was a desperate one—that neither he nor his men could expect any mercy from Lord Dane, and there was nothing to do but sell their lives as dearly as possible.

But to attempt it where they stood, in the open country, was certain death; there was not even the ghost of a chance.

Their only shadow of a hope was in seeking some shelter where they might make a stand for a few hours at least.

By that time a strong detachment would probably be sent from the camp to search for them, and the enemy might find themselves outwitted.

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, he cast his eyes around and espied a small church that stood probably a quarter of a mile distant.

It was built of stone, and as the enemy had no artillery, in it they might stand a siege of even two or three days.

Turning to his companions in a few hurried words the young patriot communicated the idea to them, and they immediately started at their utmost speed toward the building.

As yet the advancing enemy were not within musket range, and the fugitives were able to reach it in safety.

Hardly had they done so, however, when the British Rangers also reached and surrounded it.

Securely barring the door, and stationing themselves at the windows the patriots singled out each his man, and not a bullet missed its mark.

The British answered with a terrific volley, and firing at random, it did no damage besides shivering the glass in the windows.

The patriots who had taken the opportunity behind the shelter of the wall to reload, again answered the fire, and once more each bullet found its billet.

For more than half an hour this deadly one-sided combat was kept up, and still alternately encouraging and cursing like a demon at them for their cowardice, Lord Dane urged them on.

He seemed to bear a charmed life, dashing here and there where the bullets flew the thickest without once being hit.

His men, however, were not so fortunate.

More than a hundred of them had fallen never to rise again, and the remainder were evidently beginning to grow discouraged.

Suddenly Lord Dane pointed toward the sky, and as he did so a cheer broke from their lips.

The besieged party, noticing the action and hearing the cheer, looked at each other inquiringly.

What did it mean?

Were reinforcements of artillery coming?

It seemed the only probable explanation, when suddenly a simultaneous cry of dismay broke from their lips.

Though the walls of the church were built of stone, the roof and the inside finishings were of wood, and a forked tongue of flame protruding through the roof, showed the cause of the besieger's exultation.

The church was being burnt about their ears.

Even as the knowledge came to them they could hear Lord Dane's voice.

"Surround it!" he commanded, "and give no quarter. Let not one of the cursed rebels escape!"

The woodwork was as dry as tinder, and in a few moments the whole roof was ablaze, and then streams of flame were beginning to dart along the paneling of the walls to the floor.

The young rangers were certainly in a frightful predicament.

Any attempt to extinguish the flames would be worse than useless, and already the heat and smoke were becoming unendurable.

What was to be done?

There was but one of two alternatives possible—to remain and die of suffocation, or make a desperate sortie and fall before the bayonets and bullets of the red-coated butchers waiting outside.

It was but a choice of dooms—one was inevitable.

Which should it be?

Should they perish in the smoke and flame, or fall before the lead and steel?

CHAPTER XVI.

A GALLANT SORTIE.

The situation which the young Patriot Rangers were now placed in was certainly a desperate one.

On either hand was certain death. Which should they choose?

They looked up, with the unspoken question in their eyes from one another to their captain.

For a moment Dane Vincent stood with his glance fastened on the floor, as if either utterly overwhelmed by the situation, or deep in thought, meditating some way of escape.

Evidently it was the latter, for looking up suddenly he addressed his companions:

"Comrades," he said, "we are in a desperate situation, and none but desperate means can get us out of it. I have an idea that may or may not be successful, but if we pause to consider it the decisive moment may have passed. There is no choice but to try my scheme, and if it fails, we can still die as patriots in the cause of their country should die."

He paused a moment, as if suddenly struck by some new idea. His comrades waited in breathless silence for his orders.

Meanwhile the flame had crept down the wooden-finished wall and caught in the planks of the floor.

The atmosphere was stifling, the heat intense. It was a question of seconds, not minutes, as to what their fate would be.

In silence Dane Vincent unbuckled the powder pouch of the man nearest to him, and opened it.

At this period, cartridges were almost a thing unknown, and the powder was carried loose in the pouch.

It was little more than a quarter filled, and the captain rapidly commanded the rest to empty the contents of their powder into it until it was full.

When it was so it probably held three or four pounds of powder, and taking it, Dane Vincent rapidly crossed the floor towards the chancel window.

Tis intention was now evident.

The main body of the enemy were grouped around the door, confident that at the last the smoke and flames would force the young patriots to make a maddened rush for the open air, when they would fall easy victims to overwhelming numbers.

Dane Vincent well understood this, and he had contrived a scheme to baffle their plans.

He was going to blow a hole through the wall of the church, and under cover of the smoke and confusion make a desperate sortie for life and liberty.

Fastening the pouch against the wall by the aid of the belt attached, he turned to where his comrades were standing, some of them even yet hardly comprehending his intention.

"Fix bayonets," he commanded. "Throw yourselves upon your faces, and as soon as you hear the explosion follow me."

Even while he was speaking he had placed a slow match to the powder pouch and ignited it; then retreating, he threw himself prostrate upon the floor.

His comrades followed his example, each holding their breath in expectation of the moment when the fuse would reach the powder.

Slowly the sputtering spark crept nearer, and then—

The whole building trembled as if it was about to fall to the earth, and a terrific explosion rent the air.

A few fragments of stone went whizzing through the building, but the main portion had been carried outward.

Even through the dense smoke it could be seen that an opening had been made, and leaping to their feet the young Rangers followed their captain through it.

For a breathing space the enemy were too completely taken by surprise to be able to offer any resistance, until the gallant youths had broken through their line.

The next moment a cry of dismay broke from their lips; it was answered by a ringing cheer from the young Rangers.

Fortune favors the brave, it is said, and in this instance, at any rate, it certainly seemed so.

A fragment of the flying stone had struck Lord Dane's horse upon the head, killing it instantly, and bringing both animal and rider to the ground.

The young nobleman was uninjured, but before he could disentangle himself from the stirrups Dane Vincent had sprung forward and seized him by the throat.

The next moment a pistol was drawn from the young patriot's belt and pressed against his prisoner's head.

"Move an inch, or attempt any resistance, and you die!" he said, in a stern voice.

"Fire upon them! Shoot them down where they stand!" Lord Dane cried, quite beside himself with passion. "If you let one of them escape I'll have you all hung as rebels."

In an instant a hundred muskets were leveled, but with a sudden movement Dane Vincent released his hold of the prisoner's throat, and seizing him around the waist held him in front of him as a shield between himself and his men.

"Fire a single shot," he cried derisively, "and your captain dies!"

The British partially lowered their leveled muskets in doubt as to how to act.

"You see I have profited by your example, Lord Dane," his captor said sarcastically. "If one of my men is so much as touched, you die. Make your choice and give your orders accordingly."

A fierce oath came crashing from between Lord Dane's teeth, and he bit his lip until the bloom came.

He realized the utter helplessness of his position, however, and in a voice that was trembling with suppressed passion, he gave the order:

"Ground arms!"

Then he added, addressing himself to his captors:

"What do you wish me to do next? How long is this farce to last?"

"Until reinforcements arrive, when we will have the pleasure of escorting yourself and your men to our camp; and while we are waiting I wish to ask you a few questions."

Lord Dane made no answer. Mingled rage and mortification rendered him incapable of utterance. Dane Vincent went on:

"What did you mean when we first met by saying I was your brother?" he asked.

A little sneering laugh came from Lord Dane's lips.

"I meant what I said. You are my brother—that is to say, you are my father's son. Does that satisfy you?"

It was the answer that Dane Vincent had expected, yet it wounded him none the less, but before he had time to question his prisoner further a simultaneous cry of amazement from both the patriots and the enemy checked the words.

From a curve in the road below the ground on which the two opposing forces stood, came a horse and rider at full gallop.

The rider was a woman.

She came on at full speed until within a few hundred yards of the two forces; then checking her horse's pace for a moment half turned and pointed in the direction she had come.

The next instant she had again urged on the horse, and before either party had recovered from their surprise was lost in the distance.

Almost before the sound of the horse's hoofs had died away the silence was broken by the roll of drums, and around a curve in the road a body of troops came in sight.

A hearty cheer broke from the lips of the young patriots as they recognized their comrades supported by a regiment of militia.

Before the British had time to form in fighting order the patriots were upon them.

The fight, though short, was terrific while it lasted, but it was decided.

More than a hundred of the British went down never to rise again, and the rest turned and ran for their lives.

The patriots pursued them for a short distance, but when about a hundred prisoners had been taken the bugles sounded the recall, and the remainder of the fugitives were left unmolested.

Among those who managed to make their escape was Lord Dane.

Almost in the very beginning of the fight a bullet had struck Dane Vincent in the head, rendering him unconscious, so that his prisoner was able to slip away, and mingling with the rest of the fugitives, escaped unrecognized.

The still unconscious body of the young captain of the Rangers was placed upon a litter and carried to the camp, where after a few hours of uncertainty the surgeon pronounced the wound dangerous but not necessarily mortal.

Meanwhile the subject of conversation throughout the whole camp was the mysterious female who had warned the main army of the Rangers' situation, and had ridden on to guide them to the spot.

No one had seen her face. She had given the warning and

vanished, appearing again when the relief party had begun their march, and riding a few hundred yards ahead of them until the church was reached.

It was more than mysterious.

Was she mortal or some guardian spirit?

CHAPTER XVII.

A TERRIBLE SHOCK.

For several weeks Dane Vincent lay in the hospital in a precarious condition.

It was a turn of the hand either way whether he lived or died.

At last, however, his strong constitution triumphed, and the surgeon declared him out of danger.

During his convalescence Old Huckleberry, the scout, who had been absent from the camp for a longer period than usual, came to visit him.

The young man's first question was relative to Alice Allan.

"I gave you the note she sent," said Old Huckleberry, "and since that time I ain't heard nothing from her. The last time I seen her was about three weeks ago, and she was safe in her father's house in Philadelphia."

"You are not deceiving me?" the young man asked anxiously.

The old scout assumed an injured air.

"See hyar, cap'n," he said, "you mean no offense, I suppose, so I take none, but not even Gen'ral Washington himself ever went for to doubt my word. Dan'l Huckaby is my name, called Huckleberry fer short, and what I says I don't go back on, and I mean it every time. I tell yer I saw the gal safe in her father's house. Ef you don't believe it I'm sorry, but I can't weep."

With this meagre information Dane Vincent was far from content, yet it cheered him to hear that she was alive and well.

Yet even with this satisfaction was mingled a curious anxiety.

If Alice was at her father's house in Philadelphia, who was the mysterious deliverer from the British? Who was it who had warned the patriots of his own and his comrades' danger in the burning church?

The question as it came to him puzzled him.

He had never wholly believed it could be she; yet if it were not, who was it?

There was no answer, and the mystery remained deeper than ever.

During the time he had been in the hospital the battle of White Plains had been fought.

The British forces had been recruited by a draft of over five thousand Hessians, while the patriots' numbers dwindled down day by day.

By the time that Washington had determined to cross over into New Jersey, Dane Vincent was once more able to take his place at the head of his men.

The story of the month or two following belongs to history.

What heart has not throbbed with admiration at the story or the crossing of the Delaware among the snow and ice, and the complete defeat of the overwhelming forces of the enemy?

It was an exploit almost without parallel—it shames the boasted victories of Napoleon into insignificance.

More than once during the course of the campaign the gallant conduct of the young Patriot Rangers had elicited Washington's approbation, and when he determined upon marching the prisoners into Philadelphia he chose them as the escort.

Their entry into the city was, if possible, more of an ovation than on the occasion of their departure.

Their line of march was literally strewn with flowers, while everywhere they were greeted with shouts of admiring welcome.

The duty with which he had been intrusted attended to, Dane Vincent was free to follow his own desires for an hour or two.

His first act was to proceed to the house of Mr. Allan.

The door was opened by the old colored woman who had been Alice's nurse, and who uttered a cry of surprise upon recognizing him.

"De Lord bress us, Massa Dane, and is that you, your own self?" she said. "And how is Missy Alice? Tell me, now, Massa Dane, is the chile well? I carried her in my arms since she was born, an' it most broke my old heart when I don't see her no more."

Dane Vincent started back in utter amazement.

"You ask me how she is?" he asked. "Is she not here?"

"Now, Massa Dane, don't go for ter fool with the ole woman. Tell me how my little missy is, and then you can have all the fun you want to."

"But I tell you, woman," Dane Vincent said, "I have not seen her since the night I left Philadelphia and brought her home. Do you mean to tell me she is not here?"

The old woman began to cry and wring her hands.

"I tole you the truth, Massa Dane," she sobbed. "She done gone away the same night and never came back no more."

The young man's face grew pallid to the very lips, and he clutched at the door as if for support.

"And where is her father?" he said at length.

"Massa done gone away yesterday to Boston, and he won't be home for two weeks. He's cruel hard, too, on missy, and he swar he never speak to her again."

Like a drunken man, or one in a dream, Dane Vincent turned from the door back to the street.

The shock he had received had been so sudden, so unexpected, so overwhelming, that as yet he could not realize its full extent.

As he walked along, gradually his faculties became clearer, and he was able to think more calmly.

"She is dead," he said to himself. "Why should I not die, too!"

The tears started from his eyes in spite of himself. Never in his whole life had he been moved, nor suffered as he did now.

Suddenly, however, another thought flashed through his mind, and as it did so his eyes grew stern, and his face cold and pitiless as stone.

"Fool! Dupe!" he cried, "not to have suspected before that the scout was deceiving me. But I know it now. My heart is dead within me, but I will not die! I will live for my country and for revenge!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE STAKE.

Dane Vincent had not spoken idly when he had said his heart was dead within him.

Until now he had hardly realized how much he had loved the girl, and he felt that without her life was a blank.

He no longer doubted that she was dead, though of the manner of her fate in the hands of the ruthless Hessians and their savage allies he shuddered to think.

From that moment even his patriotism became a secondary object to the revenge he had sworn.

The following morning he again proceeded to the banker's house and questioned the old nurse closely.

Her answers, while they confirmed her story of the previous

night, gave no further information, and the young man was obliged to return to his duty, his breast still racked with anxious doubts and fears.

The following day the young Rangers received orders to rejoin the main army.

Washington was already in his winter quarters at Morristown, while the British were in garrison at Brunswick.

Again Dane Vincent was destined to be thwarted in his quest.

The old scout had been in camp for the two preceding days, but on the very morning of the young Rangers' arrival he had again taken his departure.

Bitterly the young captain cursed his ill-luck, but he told himself it could not last forever.

Sooner or later the scout and he must meet, and then the reckoning would be a terrible one.

Two days later a spy was captured hanging about the lines, and in the hope of having his life spared, he gave the patriots much information as to the movements of the enemy.

More than half the entire force, he said, was advancing stealthily towards the patriot camp, with the intention of concentrating their numbers and taking them by surprise.

Lord Dane, to whose command a force of over two hundred Indians had been added, was also among the advancing forces.

The information was too valuable to be neglected, and Washington at once determined to send out scouts to learn whether the prisoner had told the truth.

Unfortunately, however, all the scouts were employed, and the duty had to be undertaken by some volunteer.

It was an undertaking requiring more than ordinary bravery as well as tact, and when Dane Vincent offered his services they were gladly accepted.

The prisoner had given a minute description of the various points occupied by the enemy, and when night had fallen over the camp the young man started upon his expedition.

It was an expedition of more than ordinary peril and importance, but without any hope of personal glory.

If it were successful it might save the patriot army, but if not so, and he was taken prisoner, his doom by the articles of war was death at the end of a rope.

The nearest point indicated by the captured spy was nearly seven miles distant, and eager to know the truth as soon as possible, the young man hurried on with less caution than he should have done.

A heavy fall of snow lay on the ground, and though the sky was overcast, it rendered his figure conspicuous.

Still he apprehended no danger for a mile or two at least, beyond, perhaps, an accidental meeting with some individual on the same errand as himself, and as he was well armed he felt quite ready for such an emergency.

Suddenly, however, the hoot of an owl rang through the silence, echoed immediately by similar answering calls from all sides.

In an instant he checked his pace, and drawing his pistols stood ready to sell his life dearly.

Quick as a flash he realized that the captured spy had lied, and that the British were two or three miles nearer the patriot camp than he had stated, while he was in an ambush of an advance guard of Indians.

Hardly had this idea come into his head than from the shelter of the surrounding bushes nearly a hundred dark figures sprang forward to seize him.

His pistols spoke in rapid succession, and two of the savages fell dead in their tracks, but the next instant a dozen hands had seized and held him so that to even move was impossible.

A few hurried words in their own language passed between his captors, and then firmly tying his hands together they hurried him rapidly towards the woods.

For more than a quarter of an hour they hurried on in

ominous silence, until through the darkness ahead of them shone the light of a fire.

As they drew nearer they saw an officer wrapped in a long cloak sitting beside it, while his horse was picketed a few yards distant.

Looking up as the Indians approached, Dane Vincent recognized him at once as Lord Dane.

One of the Indians, who by an extra plume on his head-dress appeared to be chief, advanced and addressed a few words to him, when he started from his seat, and walking to where his horse was standing, seized the bridle rein.

"A spy, you say?" he said. "A spy's doom is instant death. He is your prisoner, not mine. Do with him as you like, but it will not do for me to be present."

He walked along, still leading his horse by the bridle rein, until he reached the spot where the prisoner stood.

"You will not escape this time, my dear young patriot," he said. "You seem to have the luck of escaping lead and steel, but our allies here have a better way of serving their prisoners. They are going to burn you at the stake. It is their business, not mine. Even for the satisfaction I should feel at seeing the ceremony, I am not going to risk a court martial, so I will bid you a long adieu."

He placed his foot in the stirrup, and leaping into the saddle added:

"I will remember you to the fair Alice when I see her, which I hope to do when I return to my quarters to-morrow."

With this parting shaft he struck his spurs into his horse and rode away, leaving the prisoner utterly overwhelmed by his words.

Was it possible they could be true?

Was the true explanation of Alice's mysterious disappearance that she was a prisoner in the hands of this young fiend in human form?

The very thought rendered Dane Vincent frantic, and utterly oblivious to the terrible fate in store for himself.

Meanwhile the Indians were making preparations for his execution. Every expression of fiendish delight at their task.

At last, they hurried to a more open spot, and binding him to the trunk of a tree began piling dry boughs and wood around.

In a very few moments the pile had grown to huge proportions, and then one of the savages, seizing a blazing stick from the bivouac fire, thrust it among the dry brushwood.

For several seconds it did not ignite, but a dense black smoke arose, almost suffocating the helpless victim.

Then a fierce blaze suddenly leaped up and curled itself in thin, fang-like forks of flame around him.

A yell of ferocious delight broke from the lips of the savages, and they began their war-dance around the pile, chanting, as they did so, a wild song of triumph.

With set teeth, Dane Vincent determined that, suffer as he might, not one word of pain from him should add to their demoniac satisfaction.

Still his agony was intense—excruciating.

In spite of himself a low moan broke from his parched lips, and a wild delirium coming over his senses, he prayed—prayed for death.

Hope of escape there was none—the only mercy that could now be vouchsafed to him was unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XIX.

SNATCHED FROM DEATH.

With clenched teeth and eyelids vainly trying to screen the pupils beneath from the scorching flame, Dane Vincent prayed for unconsciousness.

Every nerve and sinew quivered with pain until the agony grew almost more than mortal strength could endure.

The limit of human suffering was fast being reached, and a dull lethargic torpor was beginning to overpower his senses, when a cry of terrified amazement broke simultaneously from the lips of all his savage captors.

At the same instant, also, they stopped suddenly short in their dance of triumph, and prostrated themselves on their faces on the snow-covered ground.

Advancing rapidly toward him, the young patriot saw a female figure clothed in long, flowing white robes.

For a moment or two he could hardly believe his eyes.

It was none other than the mysterious being who already more than once had saved his life.

In the pallid light of the snow she looked even more pallid-like and ghostly than before, as she glided to the young man's side.

The next moment a keen-edged knife had severed his bonds and he was free.

The savages still lay with their faces to the ground, evidently awe-stricken with the belief that she was some supernatural being.

Still in silence she motioned the young man to follow her, and passed rapidly through their circle toward the woods.

Here in the shelter of the trees two horses were waiting, and mounting one of the animals herself, she commanded Dane Vincent to mount the other.

By this time the savages had recovered from their first awe-stricken surprise, and were talking and gesticulating wildly among themselves.

Evidently they were debating whether or not they should follow the fugitive, and his mysterious guide, urging on her horse along the bridle path, the young man followed.

In less than a quarter of an hour the main road was reached, when the guide checked her animal's pace.

"Ride as fast as you can back to the camp," she said, "and give the alarm. There are five thousand British not a mile away, and they intend a surprise at daybreak. Make all haste, for there is not a moment to lose."

She turned her horse's head in an opposite direction as she finished speaking, but Dane Vincent checked her.

"But for yourself?" he asked. "You will be in danger."

"Have no fear," was the answer. "Friends and foes are alike to me."

She uttered the words in a plaintive tone; in spite of himself, the young man felt a touch of superstitious awe.

Who was this mysterious being? Was it possible that she was more than mortal?

Shaking off the feeling, however, he again addressed her:

"Let me have but one glance at your face," he said. "If your features are like your voice, it would be the happiest moment of my life."

For a second a tremor seemed to shake her figure, and for an instant her hand was raised, as if to remove her veil, but the next she checked the impulse.

"No," she said, "it cannot be. Lose no time in warning your comrades of their danger. Adieu!"

She loosed her bridle rein as she spoke, and her horse springing forward in a few moments she was lost to sight.

The young man's first impulse was to follow her, but remembering the information she had given him and how much hung upon its being communicated in time, he was forced to restrain and turn his horse's head toward the patriot camp, riding rapidly so as to get there in good time.

In less than half an hour it was reached, and proceeding at once to the general's headquarters the young Ranger communicated the news to him.

It was yet little more than midnight, and a few minutes later the sound of bugles rang through the camp, arousing the troops from their slumber.

Extra ammunition was served out to each man, and in less than half an hour a force of nearly three thousand strong had marched out of the camp.

Foremost among them was the young Patriot Rangers, and notwithstanding the terrible ordeal through which he had passed, their captain was at their head.

In solemn silence the columns moved on, their footfalls making no more noise upon the snow-covered ground than if they had been a spectered army on the march.

Making a detour past the spot where Dane Vincent had been captured by the Indian outposts, the patriots marched on for nearly a mile further, when on a stretch of open ground before them the patriots could see the light of the enemy's bivouac fires.

A fringe of woods concealed the patriots from the view of the sentinels as they marched up and down on their beats, and in obedience to the words of command given in suppressed tones, they formed in order of attack.

Then came the order in clear, ringing tones:

"Advance! Charge!"

A hearty cheer broke the silence of the night with a million echoes, as, like a resistless avalanche, the patriots dashed upon the enemy's camp.

Taken wholly by surprise, the British had not time to form into any sort of order to make even the show of resistance.

Although they numbered two to one of the patriots, it did not take five minutes to decide the victory.

Those who had hastily snatched up their arms, flung them away again, and took to their heels for the woods, glad to escape with their lives.

It was not only a defeat but an utter rout—an ignominious stampede.

The patriot commander had turned the tables with a ven-

geance, and the would-be surprise party had been themselves surprised most disagreeably.

But thirty men in the patriot forces had been killed and several slightly wounded, but the British loss was terrible.

More than five hundred had gone down, never to rise again.

Besides this, the patriots had taken nearly a thousand prisoners, as well as captured three pairs of regimental colors and a hundred stand of arms.

Not in the silent way they had left did they return to the camp, but with rolling drums and elated with their victory.

Of them all, Dane Vincent alone seemed dispirited and anxious.

The parting taunt of Lord Dane regarding Alice Allan troubled him more than he cared to own, and he had resolved when setting out with the expedition to seek the young nobleman and make him prisoner either dead or alive.

During the short conflict, however, he had been nowhere to be seen, and now, although more than two hundred of his men were prisoners, he was not among them.

To the young patriot it almost seemed as if fate took a mischievous pleasure in keeping him out of his hands.

CHAPTER XX.

IN DANGER.

Slowly and drearily the winter months dragged away.

The deprivations and hardships the patriot army were forced to endure were terrible, and nothing else than the noble enthusiasm that fired their hearts could have supported them under their sufferings.

At last, however, the spring opened, and active preparations for continuing the campaign began on both sides.

The young Patriot Rangers had been regularly detailed for outpost duty, and again their captain was thwarted in his desire to meet and have an explanation with the old scout.

The fate of Alice Allan still remained a mystery.

No decisive move was made by either army until the latter part of July, when the British, under General Howe, landed at the mouth of Elk river and marched to the head of the Brandywine.

Here they were met by Washington, when, after a fierce encounter, the patriots were defeated.

During the battle, the young Rangers were, as usual, in General Sullivan's division, and when the retreat was sounded they were about the last to obey the order.

A regiment of newly recruited militia, who had never been under fire before, were falling back in utter disorder, and Dane Vincent called to his men to form and cover their retreat.

As the words left his lips a fresh battalion came sweeping down, completely cutting him off from his men, and by the force of their greater numbers, carrying the Rangers along with them against their will.

At the same moment a troop of British cavalry came charging

ing down in pursuit of the fugitives, and still further separating the young captain from his comrades.

To have attempted to rejoin them would have resulted in nothing but death or capture, and determined to make a bold dash for liberty, he struck his spurs into his horse's flanks, and galloped off in a directly opposite direction.

It seemed an utterly foolhardy and reckless act, but its very recklessness made it successful, and he was able to reach a clump of woods half a mile or so from the scene of battle, without being pursued.

Here dismounting, he led his horse by the bridle rein until he had passed through the trees and reached the open country beyond.

By this time it was growing dusk, and noticing a half ruinous barn a short distance away, he hastened towards it, and pushing aside the hanging door, he peered through the opening.

It was evidently empty, and leading the horse inside, he removed the bridle, and once more going out, with the blade of his sword he cut an armful of the long grass growing around, and placed it before the animal.

It was his intention to remain here until about midnight.

By that time, he reasoned, both the retreat and pursuit would be ended, and with his horse refreshed he would be able to make the attempt to regain the patriot forces with some hope of success.

Hardly had he placed the food before the animal, however, than the sound of voices was heard outside, and the next moment two men entered the building.

"We can lie down here and take a sleep," one of them was saying, "and first thing in the morning we will take the dispatches to the general. We'll tell him how hard we had to fight to get them, and he'll believe us."

When their voices had first fallen on his ear Dane Vincent had seized his horse's head to check the noise of his eating, and the animal, as if understanding that silence was required, stood motionless.

He, quite unsuspecting of any listener, continued to eat together, and the young man soon gathered sufficient to know they were deserters from one of the British militia regiments who had waylaid one of the patriot scouts, and killing him, gained possession of the dispatches he carried.

As he listened he determined to regain the dispatches, cost what it might.

From the sound of their voices he was able to calculate pretty nearly the spot where they were seated, and releasing his hold of his horse's head, he grasped the handle of his pistol.

No sooner had he done so than the animal again commenced to munch the grass, and the two men started to their feet with an exclamation of terrified surprise.

Before they could draw their weapons, or make any attempt at resistance, Dane Vincent was beside them.

Dealing one a heavy blow with the butt of the pistol that sent him like a log to the floor, he seized the other by the throat.

The next moment he had also cast him to the floor, and

stood over him with the muzzle of his pistol pressed against forehead.

"If you attempt any resistance," he said, "I will blow your brains out on the instant."

The prisoner, however, had no idea of doing so. Instead, he pleaded for his life in the most abject terms, and removing his weapons as well as the dispatches, Dane bound their hands and feet firmly with their belts.

Then returning to where his horse was standing he replaced the bridle, and led him out of the building.

Pausing a moment, he released the hands of the prisoners, and leaping into the saddle dashed into the darkness.

He congratulated himself upon the lucky chance that caused the dispatches to fall into his hands, for they might be of the utmost importance.

There was to be no time lost, for every moment might be precious, and he urged on his horse faster towards the fringe of woods.

Though chafing at the delay, he was yet obliged to be cautious, for he was unaware in which direction the patriot army had retreated.

The moon also was rising, making it almost as bright as day, and until he had by some means learned the locality of the enemy he was obliged to keep in the shelter of the trees.

Again leading his horse by the bridle rein, he went on for nearly a quarter of an hour longer, when suddenly directly in front of him, he heard the rattle of a musket, and the click of the lock.

The next moment rang out sharp and clear the challenge:

"Who goes there?"

CHAPTER XXI.

A DOUBLE RECOGNITION.

For a second or two Dane Vincent stood irresolute how to act.

Had he been in the open country he would have vaulted into the saddle, and trusted to his horse's speed; but here it was impossible.

Suddenly an idea struck him.

Releasing his hold upon the animal's bridle he threw himself prostrate on the ground.

The challenge was repeated.

"Who goes there?" the sentry said. "Answer or I fire."

The horse still went on toward the sentry, who, as he had threatened, raised his musket and fired.

The animal gave a snort of pain, and rolled over to the ground, evidently with one of his limbs broken.

A feeling of sorrow came over the young Ranger at having thus sacrificed his noble horse, but there was no time for vain regrets.

No sooner had he fallen to the ground than, seeking the thickest underbrush, he began to crawl away; but his progress was necessarily slow, and when the guard, aroused by the sentinel's shot, turned out, he still was within hearing.

The sentry was greeted with a roar of derisive laughter.

"You hought to be promoted," the sergeant said sarcastically. "A nice prisoner you've taken, and no mistake. You hought to be whipped for shooting a hanimal like that. Lord Dane would have given many guineas for him."

His ruse had cost the young captain of the Rangers his noble charger, but it had saved his life.

The soldier evidently thought it was some stray animal, whose owner had been killed during the battle of the previous day.

With a parting joke at his expense, the guard again turned in, while the sentry resumed his measured tread.

After crawling along for a few hundred yards further, Dane arose to his feet, stood for a few minutes meditating upon his situation.

He was, indeed, in a trap.

If he went on, he could not tell how soon he might come upon another outpost of the enemy.

Evidently there was nothing to do but to wait for daybreak, when the troops would probably resume their march, and leave the coast clear for him to make his escape.

Anxious as he was to deliver the recovered dispatches to the general, he chafed fiercely at the delay, but it was inevitable.

As he finally came to this conclusion, he selected the largest tree he could find, and began to climb it.

Ascending to the highest limb that would bear his weight, he looked around upon the country beneath him.

On every hand it was dotted with bivouac fires; but whether of friend or enemy, he could not tell.

Still further confirmed in his resolve to wait until morning, he fastened himself to the branch with his belt, and overcome by the fatigue of the day, was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke the dawn was breaking.

Looking around, he saw the wisdom of the plan he had adopted, for the bivouacs on every side were those of the British.

Presently the reveille sounded, and the troops responding to the call, replenished the fires, and set about preparing breakfast.

The young Ranger had calculated that as soon as the meal was over they would resume their march, but in this he was destined to be disappointed.

The assembly sounded, and the men fell into parade order while the roll was called, and then the parade was dismissed.

It was plain the march was not to be continued that day.

The situation was growing desperate.

He had eaten nothing since the previous morning, and he began to be assailed by the pangs of hunger.

The hours passed away, and the sun came out with scorching heat, and he also began to suffer the agony of intense thirst.

At last, growing utterly reckless, he descended from the tree, determined to make an escape, or perish in the attempt.

He had noticed in one direction a narrow portion of the woods that seemed unguarded, and towards it he made his way.

Crawling cautiously along his progress was necessarily slow, but it was better than the enforced inactivity in the tree.

Suddenly from the foliage before him a man's figure started in view.

One look at his face was sufficient for recognition, and with a half-uttered ejaculation of surprise, Dane Vincent sprang towards him.

It was Old Huckleberry, the scout.

"So we have met again at last," the young man said in a tone that vibrated with suppressed passion, "and if it costs both our lives, you shall not pass without an explanation."

Old Huckleberry took the situation very calmly.

"You needn't be so rambunctious, cap'n," he said. "Any information you wants, and I knows on, I'll give yer, but yer must speak quieter."

"I want to know what you have done with Miss Allan."

"Waal, now, that is rich. What have I done with her? I hain't done nothin'. The last time I saw her she was well, an'——"

The young man interrupted passionately:

"You told me the last time I saw you she was safe in her father's house. She never returned there. Where is she? Tell me no more lies——"

A deep flush mounted to the old scout's face, and he dropped wholly his affected roughness as he answered:

"Captain Vincent," he said, "I allow no one to tell me I lie. I do not lie. If I choose to assume a character——"

The fury of the young man's so long suppressed emotions made his rage ungovernable.

"You are a traitor!" he cried, and as he spoke he sprang at the scout's throat.

Closing in grim silence for a few seconds, they struggled together for the mastery.

The old scout was a more than ordinary powerful man, but the young Ranger's fury lent him an added strength, and at last he threw his antagonist to the ground, and with his fingers still clutching his throat like a band of steel, he placed his knee upon his breast.

With his right hand he drew his sword from its sheath, and held it poised above the other's breast.

"Are you going to murder me?" the old scout asked.

"No," Dane Vincent answered. "I am only going to give you the reward you have earned. They hang traitors, but you shall die by this sword which has never been dishonored before."

Again the scout spoke:

"You wrong me. I deceived, it is true, but it was for your own good. Miss Allan is safe and well——"

"Do not die with a lie upon your lips," the young man interrupted, "for I have sworn that die you shall, and I will keep my word."

He still further shortened his sword arm for the deadly stroke, but before the blade could descend there was a rustle of a woman's dress beside him, and a soft hand was laid on his.

Looking up, he saw the veiled figure of his mysterious deliverer.

"Release him," she commanded. "He is no traitor, but your true friend and mine."

The upraised sword arm was lowered, but still he kept his knee upon the scout's breast and his hand upon his throat.

"You do not know how he has wronged me," he said.

"He has not wronged you. Look and see."

As she spoke she raised her hand and drew aside her veil.

A cry of the most glad surprise left Dane Vincent's lips when he saw her face.

It was that of Alice Allan.

CHAPTER XXII.

STILL IN PERIL.

As Dane Vincent recognized in the face of the veiled figure the features of the girl he loved, an ejaculation of the utmost amazement broke from his lips.

At the same time he involuntarily released his grip upon Old Huckleberry's throat.

This fact the old scout was not slow to take advantage of, and he quickly regained an upright position.

For several seconds the young man was too bewildered to speak.

"Alice!" he gasped, at length, "is it possible? Do I dream?"

The girl drew nearer to him with outstretched hands, and a look of gladness lighted up her face.

"No, Dane," she said; "it is I, alive and well."

Unheeding of the presence of the old scout, Dane Vincent drew her to his bosom, and kissed her again and again, while the girl hid her blushing face upon his breast.

"My darling," he said, "I mourned for you as dead."

"As I would have been," she answered, "had it not been for this gentleman. He has been a true and faithful friend to me always, and more than once has saved my life at the peril of his own."

She looked as she spoke toward Old Huckleberry, who stood by her lovers with a half-amused smile upon his coun-

Removing his encircling arms from the girl's form, Dane Vincent advanced to where he stood, and held out his hand.

"Forgive my rash and hasty words just now," he said. "I am heartily ashamed of them, and I hope you will bear me no malice."

The old scout seized the offered hand, and wrung it with a vise-like grip.

"I don't blame you a particle, captain," he answered, heartily. "Had I been in your place I should have done the same. It kind of went against me to keep the truth from you all the time, but there was no help for it."

He once more wrung the young man's hand, and then asked:

"How comes it that you're in this trap the same as us?"

Dane Vincent briefly related the circumstances, adding that he was only awaiting the night to make an attempt to reach the patriot camp.

"That is the only thing that can be done," the old scout

answered, "and as we have nearly three hours to wait yet we may as well take it easy."

He led the way towards a spot where the undergrowth was thickest, and parting the foliage the three seated themselves, completely hidden from view of any one a yard distant.

"There is nothing like being cautious," Old Huckleberry observed. "One can never tell who may be prowling about."

As they sat there waiting until the night should fall, Dane Vincent learned the whole of Alice Allan's adventure.

Finding it impossible to return to her father's house, and her heart full of patriotic longing to aid the glorious cause to which her lover had devoted himself, she had communicated her wishes to the old scout, and asked him to aid her in her resolve.

To her request he had acceded at once, and instinctively knowing her to be a girl of no ordinary courage and determination, the idea had come into his mind that in the position of a scout she would be of invaluable service to the patriot cause.

He had, when taken prisoner by the British and left her in their hands, been merely playing a part.

The dispatches he had given into Colonel Campbell's hands he had captured from a British scout the day before, and it was only when driven to do so by the force of circumstances that he had delivered them to the officer to whom they were addressed.

As the dispatches with which he was intrusted for the Congress at Philadelphia would admit of no delay, he deemed it best to allow Alice to remain the guest of the British officer until his mission was accomplished.

This he arrived in time to do, just at the moment, when, having warned the Rangers of their captain's peril, she was alone in a hastily evacuated camp.

Since then the old scout and she had worked together, and the services she had rendered the patriot cause by her cool and intrepid bravery was incalculable.

It was by the scout's advice that she had assumed her phantom-like disguise, and the effect produced by it in more than one instance has already been seen.

There were many minor circumstances, but these will be sufficient to make the mystery clear in the mind of the reader.

When the girl's narrative was concluded, Dane Vincent once more extended his hand toward Old Huckleberry.

The old scout was about to grasp it, when suddenly he paused, and instead his hand sought the handle of the long knife at his waist.

The next moment he had turned and glided away noiselessly through the bushes.

Before his two companions could conjecture as to the cause of this strange conduct there was a smothered groan, and once more the scout's face showed itself.

"There are Indians in the woods," he said. "I have just settled one, but there may be more, and we had better try and make for the open country."

In silence Alice and Dane Vincent arose and followed him into the more open woods toward the unguarded spot for which the young Ranger had been making when he had encountered the scout.

For nearly a quarter of an hour they proceeded noiselessly, when suddenly the guide stopped.

"Look yonder," he said, as he spoke laying one hand on Dane Vincent's arm and with the other pointing through a sort of vista in the trees, through which, in the field beyond on the very edge of the woods, could be seen two horses tethered.

"We must have them if possible," he whispered. "Wait here until I return."

Even as he spoke he turned and glided toward the field, his footsteps not making the slightest sound among the fallen leaves.

He still retained his upright position until he reached the edge of the woods, when he dropped prostrate on the ground, and crawled unseen through the long grass toward the stake to which the tethers were fastened.

Realizing how much depended on obtaining the animals, Dane Vincent was still trying to follow him with his eyes when he felt Alice's clutch.

"Look!" she whispered.

Turning suddenly he was just in time to see the tip of a plumed head-dress disappear in the undergrowth before him.

Evidently the savage that Old Huckleberry had killed was not alone, and his companion would no doubt make all haste back to the camp, and warn his comrades of the fact of the fugitives lurking in the woods.

As this thought flashed through his mind, he drew his sword and dashed towards the spot where he had seen the feathers disappear.

The next moment six half-naked savages, their faces and bodies hideous with crimson war paint, sprang, as it seemed, from the very earth to confront him.

Six were terrible odds against him, but the young patriot met them bravely.

Quick as a flash his sword was raised, and the foremost fell dead, his head cloven to the very chin.

Twice more the blade flashed through the air, and two more of their number bit the dust.

Then the three remaining dashed upon him, and by sheer force bore him to the ground.

Already a tomahawk was raised above his head for the death blow, when suddenly there rang out a pistol shot, and the savage who wielded it fell dead, with a bullet through his brain.

Even before the echoes of the report had ceased another was heard, and another Indian fell, never to rise again.

It was Alice Allan who fired the shots, and springing to his feet, Dane Vincent turned to the remaining savage, who was about to make his escape, and cut him down at his feet.

The brave girl's prompt action had for the time undoubtedly saved both her lover's life and her own.

But only for the time.

The noise of the pistol shot could not fail to attract attention, and the respite gained could be little more than a momentary one.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

As if in answer to these thoughts which flashed through both minds at the same instant, could be heard the notes of the bugles sounding the alarm.

Their only hope of escape now depended upon the old scout's success in securing the horses.

Even that was a forlorn one.

Seizing Alice's hand, Dane Vincent started at a sharp run for the edge of the woods.

As they drew near an expression of satisfaction left his lips.

The old scout had already secured both the animals and was busily engaged in looping the ropes, with which they had been tethered into improvised bridles.

By the time both were completed the young Ranger and Alice had reached the spot where he stood.

From the spot a complete view of the forces encamped around could be had.

They were also visible to the troops.

From the commotion in the different encampments one would have thought a hostile army had suddenly surprised them instead of three fugitives endeavoring to escape.

Old Huckleberry seemed to enjoy the scene with a species of dry humor.

"The redcoats act as if a hull swarm of hornets was about their ears," he said, unconsciously relapsing into the rude manner of speech which habit had made almost second nature to him. "But, say, captain, thar's three of us and only two hosses. Who's goin' to take Miss Allan, you or me?"

"I will, of course," Dane Vincent answered. "You lead the way."

"I thought that would be your answer. Let us make for those woods yonder."

"The woods?" Dane Vincent answered, in astonishment.

"Yes, the woods. I know what I am about. Look! They are sending a whole regiment of cavalry after us."

While they were speaking they had not been idle, and by this time they were on the horses, Dane Vincent holding Alice Allan before him.

At the scout's mention of the cavalry, he turned his head and saw, not two hundred yards distant, a regiment of dragoons dashing toward them at a gallop.

There was not a moment to be lost, and urging on their horses, the fugitives made for the woods which the scout had pointed out.

Still, they did not seem to gain much upon the pursuing troopers, who every now and then fired a volley of pistol shots after them.

They were too far distant, however, for the bullets to do any harm; but after a quarter of an hour had passed at this break-neck speed, the horse that Dane Vincent rode began to grow distressed under his double burden.

The wood was not more than half a mile distant now, but if

the horses' speed slackened any more before its shelter was gained, the pursuers would be within range.

Gradually the dragoons gained upon them, until a sharp, shooting pain between his shoulders told Dane Vincent he had been struck.

No word betrayed the fact, however, and he strove to urge on his horse to an extra spurt.

The animal responded nobly, and at last the edge of the woods was reached.

Old Huckleberry, who had been several yards in advance, had already dismounted, and in silence Dane Vincent followed his example, and leading his horse by the bridle, struck into the woods.

Hardly were they hidden by the foliage than a very shower of bullets cutting the leaves from the trees a few yards behind them told that they had not been a moment too soon.

Another volley still further behind them also told that as yet the troopers had not entered the woods, and they pressed on as fast as possible for several minutes longer.

Suddenly Old Huckleberry stopped.

"We are safe for a few minutes at any rate," he said. "The dragoons will not dismount to follow us, but will wait until some of the light infantry come up, and by that time I hope to have our retreat safely covered."

Dane Vincent looked at him wonderingly.

"Our retreat covered?" he said. "How?"

"By setting fire to the woods."

In an instant Dane Vincent saw that the plan was possible, for there was a sharp breeze blowing directly in their teeth as they had ridden along towards the woods, while the leaves upon the ground and the fallen trees were as dry as tinder.

Hastily raking a heap of the leaves together, the scout produced his flint and steel, and the next moment it was in a blaze.

For a few seconds it seemed as if it was about to die out again, but gradually it spread to the leaves scattered on the ground beyond, and the whole ground was soon covered with a

For the fugitives, the wind sprang up fresher, and in less than ten minutes the whole wood for several hundred yards behind them either way was a mass of flame, while dense volumes of blue smoke rolled up, making any pursuit impossible.

By this time the sun had set, and the dusk was rapidly approaching.

Once more leading their horses, they passed rapidly onward for an hour or more, when the gloom becoming less dense before them they knew they were again near the open country.

A few moments longer and they were once more upon their horses' backs.

Old Huckleberry recognized the locality at once, and in about a quarter of an hour they had reached the highway, and were within a mile or less of the patriot camp.

The wound Dane Vincent had received was by this time growing very painful, and in spite of himself he felt his head whirling around and a weakness creeping over him, as if he must fall from his seat.

Still he gave no token of his suffering, and at last the bivouac fires of the patriot army outposts gleamed ahead.

A few moments later they were safe within the lines, and then his physical weakness triumphing over his strength of will, he sank unconscious to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE INTERRUPTED WEDDING.

The wound Dane Vincent had received was not a dangerous one, but his loss of blood had been great, and for several weeks he was obliged to remain in the hospital.

During all this time he was nursed night and day by Alice Allan.

If such a thing were possible, he had grown to love her more than ever.

Night and day while he lay confined to his bed he had been making up his mind to a certain point, and as soon as he was convalescent he mentioned it to her.

"Alice," he said, "I think you love me."

She looked at him with loving reproach from her beautiful eyes.

"You think I do, Dane," she said. "You know I do."

"Yes, darling," he answered, drawing her nearer to him, "I was wrong. I know you do, and because you love me I want you to do something that will make me happy."

"Alice," he went on gravely, "I want you to abandon your character of scout. Perhaps it is selfish of me to ask it, but think, if anything were to happen to you, what my feelings would be."

She was silent for a moment or two, and he went on:

"You know, Alice, when you and my country were weighed in the scale when your life depended on my becoming a traitor I would have done so sooner than see you die. Do not misunderstand me, dearest, for I love you all the more for your patriotism, but I cannot endure the thought of you being in danger when I am not by your side."

She nestled closer to him, and looked into his eyes.

"Then what is it, Dane, that you would have me do?" she asked.

"Become my wife," he answered, "and then I will have a right to protect and keep you from harm."

She looked at him archly, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"And then, I suppose," she answered, "you will want to make me do as you please, whether I want to or not?"

"Cannot you trust me, dearest?"

For answer, she threw her arms around his neck, and whispered

"Always!"

So it was settled.

Less than a week later Dane Vincent was reported cured, and resumed his command.

His first task was to make arrangements for the ceremony that was to make Alice Allan his wife.

These need not have been very elaborate, for had they wished it, one of the regimental chaplains could have read the service, and the whole army would have offered their sincere congratulations.

But Alice instinctively shrank from any display upon the occasion.

With a sensitive delicacy of feeling she felt it would look selfish and unpatriotic, when the fate of the country still hung in the balance.

Dane Vincent could not but agree in this sentiment, and knowing that her decision would be the right one, left to her the choice of the place and minister.

Her choice fell upon a quiet little village church a mile or two distant from the patriot camp, and when she communicated it to her lover, he at once proceeded to the clergyman, and informed him of his wishes.

The ceremony was appointed to take place at four o'clock the following day, and at the hour appointed the small bridal party arrived.

The wedding had been kept a secret, and besides Old Huckleberry, there were but few of Dane Vincent's comrades who knew about it.

All who accompanied Dane Vincent and his bride wore the uniform of their corps, and the bride, in her simple muslin dress, looked far more lovely than many a regal one in shimmering satin and scintillating gems.

The solemn rite that made them man and wife performed, the clergyman raised his hand in benediction, as he uttered the final words:

"These whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Hardly, however, had his voice ceased, than a fierce oath broke the sacred silence of the place.

"That remains to be seen," a voice said, with a mocking laugh.

The words proceeded from near the door, and all turning in utter surprise, recognized the speaker at once.

It was Lord Dane.

"That remains to be seen," he repeated, and then, placing a silver whistle to his lips, he gave a long, shrill call.

The next moment nearly a hundred of his men, with fixed bayonets, came pouring through the door and up the aisle.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIGHT IN THE CHURCH.

For a few seconds the small bridal party stood in utter surprise at the unexpected intrusion.

Their hesitation was only momentary, however, and then drawing their swords, they formed around the bride, determined to sell their lives dearly.

The clergyman held up his hands, aghast with horror at the sacrilege.

"Forbear!" he cried. "You would not commit bloodshed in God's house, and at his very altar!"

Lord Dane interrupted him with a blasphemous oath.

"Preach to your congregation," he said, "not to me."

Then turning to his men, he commanded:

"Halt! Form!"

The men obeyed the order, and formed into line with grounded arms, while Lord Dane advanced a few paces nearer where the patriots stood at bay.

"Dane Vincent," he said, "you know I hate you. I would have killed you long ago, only you always managed to escape. Now you are fairly in my power, yet I will give you a chance for your life. Come out here and fight me hand-to-hand, and let the best man win."

For a moment the young patriot hesitated, knowing as he did the treacherous nature of his enemy, but at last he answered:

"Yes; on one condition."

"Name it."

"That on the success of the fight depends the safety of my friends. If I defeat you, they will be allowed to depart unmolested?"

"Yes, I agree. You hear?" he added, turning to his lieutenant. "If I am killed, withdraw your men, and let the party go free."

Confident that the apparently chivalrous conduct concealed some design, yet unable to imagine what it could be, Dane Vincent was forced to be content with the assurance, and leaving the little group around the altar, advanced to where the rival captain was standing.

The next moment their swords crossed, and the sparks flew in showers from the tempered steel blades.

Both were splendid swordsmen, and for several minutes neither gained any advantage.

Lord Dane fought fiercely, but his opponent, conscious of how much depended on his being the victor, contented himself at first with little more than acting on the defensive.

Both parties watched the contest with breathless interest.

At length a fierce thrust slightly wounded Dane Vincent in the shoulder, and with an expression of satisfaction at having drawn blood the young nobleman tried even more savagely to beat down his opponent's guard.

Seeing that he was becoming less guarded in his attack Dane Vincent suddenly changed his tactics, and ceasing his defensive play assumed the offensive.

At last, by a well-directed parry, the sword was dashed from Lord Dane's hand, and the young patriot, closing with him, bore him heavily to the ground.

The next instant the point of his successful opponent's sword was held against his throat.

"Do you ask for quarter?" Dane Vincent asked.

"No, curse you, never!" was the reply. "Kill me, but you shall not triumph over me."

"I am not an assassin," the young patriot said quietly. "If you do not think yourself defeated, take your sword and try again. If you do, I have your word that we shall depart without molestation."

He removed his sword as he spoke, and Lord Dane, struggling to his feet, stood perfectly livid and trembling with shame and baffled rage for a moment or two.

Then with a sudden motion he sprang towards his men. "Charge upon them!" he cried. "Kill them all except the girl. She must not be harmed."

But as he spoke a curious circumstance became apparent. Alice Allan had disappeared.

The explanation, however, was simple.

At the moment that Dane Vincent had borne his opponent to the ground, Old Huckleberry had noticed that the door leading into the small vestry was unfastened.

With the knowledge an idea flashed through his mind, and seizing the girl in his arms, he dashed through it.

The next moment they were in the open air.

At a little distance among the trees an orderly was leading Lord Dane's horse up and down, and noiselessly as a panther Old Huckleberry crawled towards him.

Before the man was aware of his peril, or could utter a single cry of alarm, the long knife of the scout flashed above his head, and was buried to the haft in his heart.

Throwing both stirrups on the same side, so as to make a rough substitute for a side saddle, he lifted the girl upon the animal's back.

"Ride for your life to the camp," he said. "I must return. I may be needed."

The girl needed no second bidding, and in response to her command the horse dashed off like the wind.

So quickly had all this been accomplished that Old Huckleberry had again reached the church by the time Lord Dane had given his treacherous command to charge.

As the words left his lips he drew a pistol from his breast and fired at Dane Vincent's head.

A slight movement on the part of the young patriot caused the bullet to pass harmlessly by, and almost before the report of the shot died away, Old Huckleberry had fired an answering shot.

His aim was true, and with a spasmodic leap in the air, Lord Dane fell face forward on the floor.

In a moment the old scout had dashed forward, and the body in his sinewy arms retreated to where his comrades were standing.

Laying him down upon the altar steps, Old Huckleberry drew his knife and placed it at his throat.

Then he turned toward the British.

They were standing immovable.

"Listen," he said, addressing the British. "Your captain is not dead, but if you do not obey his promise and allow us to depart I will cut his throat from ear to ear."

The men stood irresolute, but Lord Dane, speaking with difficulty, cried:

"Fire upon them. I am dying."

Then turning to Dane Vincent, he added, in tones of vindictive hate:

"Curse you, you have killed me, but still I triumph, for I have the secret safe."

While he had been speaking he had been unfastening a small medallion that hung upon his watch chain. Now he raised his hand to throw it towards his lieutenant, but as he did so the scout seized his wrist in a grip of iron, and took it from him.

Then Lord Dane turned a look of fierce hate upon the old scout.

"Foiled!" he said, in a hoarse, choking voice, while a look of the most malignant hatred mingled with the livid hues of death creeping over his face. "Men, avenge my death."

They were the last words he ever spoke.

The next moment his voice died away in a ghastly death rattle, and he fell back dead.

Thus ended a most unworthy life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A REVELATION.

Though Lord Dane was dead, the fact did not make the position of the patriots in the church any less desperate.

Indeed, if anything, it was more so.

They had remained up to the present time passive listeners to the tragic scene.

Hardly had the sound of Lord Dane's voice ceased than the lieutenant turned to give the order to his men to fire.

Before the command could leave his lips, however, the old scout's pistol flashed fire, and he also fell dead.

The rest of the patriots had also leveled their weapons, and each bullet found its billet.

Then with their swords drawn and backs to the wall, they stood ready to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

Their captain and lieutenant both dead, there was no other commissioned officer to take command.

In fact, they were in a panic, and it would be doubtful if they could control themselves.

Without a leader their discipline had become practically useless, and they were little better than a mob.

This Dane Vincent was not slow to see.

"To the door," he commanded.

He led the way towards the door of the vestry as he spoke, and his companions following him, they passed out of the church almost before the British had realized their object.

But they were not long to remain inactive.

Hardly had they done so when a shower of bullets came rattling against the wall behind them, but fortunately none of them did any harm, and the next moment the small party stood in the open air.

Then they began to look about them.

They soon saw what they could do.

About fifty yards distance from the church stood a dense evergreen thicket, and making for this, hardly had they reached it when the British came pouring out from the building.

Hidden among the trees, the fugitives had by this time reloaded, and they waited for the onslaught.

The British were advancing as rapidly as they could, evidently thinking that they had the little party of fugitives at their mercy, and could easily capture them.

They could see that one of the sergeants had taken command, and the men were extending in skirmishing order.

Their object evidently was to surround the thicket, and grad-

ually closing in their ranks, they could not fail eventually either to take the fugitives prisoners or shoot them down.

The fugitives now began to despair.

Their position was now very little if any better than it had been in the church.

The British had now almost surrounded the fugitives.

Suddenly, however, a hearty cheer rang through the air, and a company of patriot cavalry came charging down upon the enemy.

The fugitives recognized their friends and immediately prepared to help them in the battle which must inevitably follow, for the cavalry were too close upon the British to permit them to escape.

Fortune had favored Alice Allan, and before she had ridden a mile she had encountered this detachment, who had been reconnoitering, and they had at once come to the rescue.

The fight that ensued was very short, but decisive.

More than half the British were cut down, and the rest were marched as prisoners to the patriot camp.

Thus what looked like a forlorn hope for the fugitive's so short a time before had turned into a victory for them.

The story of the romantic marriage became known throughout the camp, and the whole army were eager in congratulations and well wishes for the happy pair.

It could not have been otherwise; for the army had thought very much of the gallant Ranger's captain, and when they found out that his wife was the woman spy they had all wondered at so many times they all gave a hearty cheer.

During the melee of the fight, however, a stray bullet had struck Dane Vincent, and he was once more obliged to be taken to the hospital.

The wound was painful but not dangerous, and in less than two weeks, during which time he was nursed by his beautiful and devoted bride, he began to grow convalescent.

Most of this time Old Huckleberry had been absent from the camp, returning on the day that Dane Vincent left the hospital for the first time, and no sooner had he reported his return than he brought an order for the young Ranger and his bride to follow him to Washington's tent.

With much wonderment pictured on their faces Dave Vincent and his wife followed the scout to the tent occupied by the Father of his Country.

The Father of his Country arose with kindly courtesy as they entered, and offered Alice a seat. Then resuming his own, he said:

"Captain Vincent, your beautiful bride is already well known to me as a pure and devoted patriot. More than once she has rendered invaluable service to the cause. It is not to compliment her, however, that I requested your presence, but to impart some information I have received that will no doubt greatly surprise you."

Then General Washington imparted something to Dane Vincent which was a surprise to him.

In silence Dane Vincent listened as the story was told.

The medallion worn by Lord Dane, and which he had attempted to throw to his lieutenant when foiled by the old scout, contained a small scrap of paper.

This when read proved to be a receipt from Mr. Allan, Alice's father, for some valuable documents committed to his care.

At first the old scout had said nothing of his discovery, but on returning to the camp procured leave of absence, and proceeding direct to Philadelphia presented the receipt.

After some hesitation the papers were given him.

They consisted for the most part of deeds and family documents; but among them was a narrative which at once threw some light on the cause of the young nobleman's persistent and malignant hatred of Dane Vincent.

Lord Dane was only an adopted son, while the young captain of the Patriot Rangers was the true heir to the title and estates.

Both children had been born about the same time, and Dane's mother, having died in giving him birth while his father was absent, it made the task of changing the children easier.

Thus the real lord was adopted as a foundling, while the impostor enjoyed his inheritance.

This confession was signed by the supposed young nobleman's mother upon her death bed, and wound up with an entreaty to her son to repair the wrong done as far as lay in his power.

How he carried out this request has been seen, and the only cause for wonder is that he had not destroyed this damaging document.

The only explanation is through some refinement of malignant feeling, but whatever it may have been could never be known, as his lips were sealed in death.

For a few minutes after the story was completed Dane Vincent sat in silence.

"I am glad, sir," he said at length, "that the mystery of my birth has been cleared up, but I would have been as happy had my parents been the poorest of the poor. The name or title I shall never claim. The name that my adopted father gave me is enough. He gave it to me through affection, and I have devoted it to the service of my country. That I hold to be a greater honor than the empty title of any despotic power."

A look of pleasure crossed Washington's face at the words so proudly spoken, and he extended his hand and wrung that of the young man warmly.

"The answer is what I should have expected from you," he said. "As you are still upon the sick list, perhaps a change of air may do you good, so I appoint you and this worthy scout to the special duty of escorting your bride to my wife's house, if she will accept it as her home, until this cruel struggle is ended."

It was by acts of spontaneous and graceful kindness such as this that Washington endeared himself to all who know him. For a few moments Dane Vincent was too overcome by emotion to reply, but at last he managed to stammer a few words of thanks.

"You owe me none," Washington said kindly, "for are we not brothers in the same glorious cause?"

Then, with a return to his air of military command, he added

"You will be in readiness to start to-night."

His heart too full of gratitude to trust himself to speak, the young Ranger and his bride followed by the old scout, left the tent.

The same evening they started on their journey.

A few days later they reached Mount Vernon in safety, and with the noble woman whom the father of his country loved. Alice Vincent found a home until the glorious end for which the patriots fought should come.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AND LAST.

It was long in coming, and it cost much blood and many tears, but it came at last.

More than six years had passed since the Declaration of Independence before the fetters of oppression were broken, and America took her place among the nations of the earth.

On the day when the young Patriot Rangers had first marched through the streets of Philadelphia they were over two hundred strong, boys, all of them, in years.

Now, when they returned, they were bronzed and bearded veterans, and though their ranks had been recruited to their original number, less than a quarter of those who had marched out so full of patriotic enthusiasm were all that remained.

The rest lay in nameless graves, with no stone to mark the spot, and only the whispering grass and the murmuring tree-tops, in their weird, mysterious language, unknown to mortal men, to breathe their requiem.

But their deeds lived after them, and though history has not recorded their names, their blood has helped to seal our liberty of to-day.

Let us revere their memory. Let us hope that when our time comes to die it may be in as pure and holy a cause.

War was virtually over with the surrender of

Cornwallis, it was not until the evacuation of New York that it was a decided fact.

History has recorded no more touching scene than the parting of Washington and his old companions in arms.

Strong men who had never faltered before the enemy's fire wept like children as they bade their illustrious chief adieu.

Almost akin to the scene was the parting of Dane Vincent and his comrades.

They all loved him as if he had been their brother, and his own eyes were dim, and his voice trembled, as one by one they wrung his hand.

All sorrowful emotions were, however, soon forgotten as he hastened to clasp his bride, so long separated from him, to his arms.

She seemed to be more beautiful than she had ever been, and as he strained her to his heart, Dane Vincent felt that his cup of bliss was full.

The cause for which he had striven triumphant, and his life's love beside him, what more can be done than to leave them to their happiness?

After many trials and long years of separation this had come at last.

Though Dane Vincent still refused to assume his real name, Congress granted him the estate, delicately adding a medal, as a reward for his valuable military services.

Here his bride and he took up their residence; and in the years that came the sound of children's merry laughter made the old house gay.

Our story is told.

Only one more character must not be forgotten.

This was an old man once known as Old Huckleberry, one of Washington's most famous scouts, but now occupying a small farm near the estate of Dane Vincent and his wife, at whose house he was a constant visitor. He was almost as great a favorite as their father with the children, who were never tired of hearing, nor he of narrating, stories of the struggles and adventures of THE RIVAL RANGERS.

THE END.

Read "OLD SIXTY-NINE; OR, THE PRINCE OF ENGINEERS," by Jas. C. Merritt, which will be the next number (235) of "Pluck and Luck."

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